FAMOUS PLAYS OF TO-DAY

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JOURNEY'S END
R. C. SHERRIFF

YOUNG WOODLEY
JOHN VAN DRUTEN

MANY WATERS
MONCKTON HOFFE

THE LADY WITH A LAMP
REGINALD BERKELEY

SUCH MEN ARE DANGEROUS
ASHLEY DUKES

MRS. MOONLIGHT
BENN W. LEVY

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JOURNEY'S END

CHARACTERS

STANHOPE – Commanding an Infantry Company

OSBORNE
TROTTER
HIBBERT
RALEIGH
} Officers of the Company

THE COLONEL

THE COMPANY SERGEANT-MAJOR

MASON – The Officers' Cook

HARDY – An Officer of another Regiment

A YOUNG GERMAN SOLDIER

TWO PRIVATE SOLDIERS OF THE COMPANY

R. C. Sherriff

JOURNEY'S END

A Play

in Three Acts

First produced by the Incorporated Stage Society at the APOLLO THEATRE, *December 9th, 1928, with the following cast :*

Stanhope – –	MR. LAURENCE OLIVIER
Osborne – –	MR. GEORGE ZUCCO
Trotter – –	MR. MELVILLE COOPER
Hibbert – –	MR. ROBERT SPEAIGHT
Raleigh – –	MR. MAURICE EVANS
The Colonel – –	MR. H. G. STOKER
The Company Sergeant-Major –	MR. PERCY WALSH
Mason – –	MR. ALEXANDER FIELD
Hardy – –	MR. DAVID HORNE
A young German soldier – –	MR. GEOFFREY WINCOTT

The play produced by MR. JAMES WHALE

Subsequently presented by MR. MAURICE BROWNE *at the* SAVOY THEATRE, *January 21st, 1929.*

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THE SCENE

A dug-out in the British trenches before St. Quentin.

A few rough steps lead into the trench above, through a low doorway. A table occupies a good space of the dug-out floor. A wooden frame, covered with wire netting, stands against the left wall and serves the double purpose of a bed and a seat for the table. A wooden bench against the back wall makes another seat, and two boxes serve for the other sides.

Another wire-covered bed is fixed in the right corner beyond the doorway.

Gloomy tunnels lead out of the dug-out to left and right.

Except for the table, beds, and seats, there is no furniture save the bottles holding the candles, and a few tattered magazine pictures pinned to the wall of girls in flimsy costumes.

The earth walls deaden the sounds of war, making them faint and far away, although the front line is only fifty yards ahead. The flames of the candles that burn day and night are steady in the still, damp air.

ACT I

Evening on Monday, the 18th March, 1918

ACT II

SCENE I : Tuesday morning

SCENE II : Tuesday afternoon

ACT III

SCENE I : Wednesday afternoon

SCENE II : Wednesday night

SCENE III : Thursday, towards dawn

ACT I

The evening of a March day. A pale glimmer of moonlight shines down the narrow steps into one corner of the dug-out. Warm yellow candle-flames light the other corner from the necks of two bottles on the table. Through the doorway can be seen the misty grey parapet of a trench and a narrow strip of starlit sky. A bottle of whiskey, a jar of water, and a mug stand on the table amongst a litter of papers and magazines. An officer's equipment hangs in a jumbled mass from a nail in the wall.

CAPTAIN HARDY, *a red-faced, cheerful-looking man, is sitting on a box by the table, intently drying a sock over a candle-flame. He wears a heavy trench-boot on his left leg, and his right foot, which is naked, is held above the damp floor by resting it on his left knee. His right boot stands on the floor beside him. As he carefully turns the sock this way and that—feeling it against his face to see if it is dry—he half sings, half hums a song—humming when he is not quite sure of the words, and marking time with the toes of his right foot.*

HARDY: One and Two it's with Maud and Lou;
Three and Four, two girls more;
Five and Six it's with—hm—hm—hm—
Seven, Eight, Clara and Caroline—

[*He lapses into an indefinite humming, and finishes with a lively burst:*

Tick!—Tock!—wind up the clock,
And we'll start the day over again.

[*A man's legs appear in the moonlit trench above, and a tall, thin man comes slowly down the dug-out steps, stooping low to avoid the roof. He takes his helmet off and reveals a fine head, with close-cropped, iron-grey hair. He looks about forty-five—physically as hard as nails.*

HARDY (*looking round*) : Hullo, Osborne ! Your fellows arriving ?

OSBORNE (*hitching off his pack and dropping it in a corner*) : Yes. They're just coming in.

HARDY : Splendid ! Have a drink.

OSBORNE : Thanks. (*He crosses and sits on the left-hand bed.*)

HARDY (*passing the whiskey and a mug*) : Don't have too much water. It's rather strong to-day.

OSBORNE (*slowly mixing a drink*) : I wonder what it *is* they put in the water.

HARDY : Some sort of disinfectant, I suppose.

OSBORNE : I'd rather have the microbes, wouldn't you ?

HARDY : *I* would—yes——

OSBORNE : Well, cheero.

HARDY : Cheero. Excuse my sock, won't you?

OSBORNE : Certainly. It's a nice-looking sock.

HARDY : It is rather, isn't it ? Guaranteed to keep the feet dry. Trouble is, it gets so wet doing it.

OSBORNE : Stanhope asked me to come and take over. He's looking after the men coming in.

HARDY : Splendid ! You know, I'm awfully glad you've come.

OSBORNE : I heard it was a quiet bit of line up here.

HARDY : Well, yes—in a *way*. But you never know. Sometimes nothing happens for hours on end ; then—all of a sudden—" over she comes ! "—rifle grenades—Minnies—and those horrid little things like pineapples—you know.

OSBORNE : I know.

HARDY : Swish—swish—swish—swish—BANG !

OSBORNE : All right—all right—I know.

HARDY : They simply blew us to bits yesterday. Minnies—enormous ones ; about twenty. Three bang in the trench. I really *am* glad you've come ; I'm not simply being polite.

OSBORNE : Do much damage ?

HARDY : Awful. A dug-out got blown up and came down in the men's tea. They were frightfully annoyed.

OSBORNE : I know. There's nothing worse than dirt in your tea.

HARDY : By the way, you know the big German attack's expected any day now ?

OSBORNE : It's been expected for the last month.

HARDY : Yes, but it's very near now ; there's funny things happening over in the Boche country. I've been out listening at night when it's quiet. There's more transport than usual coming up—you can hear it rattling over the *pavé* all night ; more trains in the distance—puffing up and going away again, one after another, bringing up loads and loads of men——

OSBORNE : Yes. It's coming—pretty soon now.

HARDY : Are you here for six days ?

OSBORNE : Yes.

HARDY : Then I should think you'll get it—right in the neck.

OSBORNE : Well, you won't be far away. Come along, let's do this handing over. Where's the map ?

HARDY : Here we are. (*He gropes among the papers on the table and finds a tattered map.*) We hold about two hundred yards of front line. We've got a Lewis gun just here—and one here, in this little sap. Sentry posts where the crosses are——

OSBORNE : Where do the men sleep ?

HARDY : *I* don't know. The sergeant-major sees

to that. (*He points off to the left.*) The servants and signallers sleep in there. Two officers in here, and three in there. (*He points to the right-hand tunnel.*) That is, if you've *got* five officers.

OSBORNE : We've only got four at present, but a new man's coming up to-night. He arrived at transport lines a day or two ago.

HARDY : I hope you get better luck than I did with *my* last officer. He got lumbago the first night and went home. Now he's got a job lecturing young officers on "Life in the Front Line."

OSBORNE : Yes. They do send some funny people over here nowadays. I hope we're lucky and get a youngster straight from school. They're the kind that do best.

HARDY : I suppose they are, really.

OSBORNE : Five beds, you say ? (*He examines the one he is sitting on.*) Is this the best one ?

HARDY: Oh, no. (*He points to the bed in the right corner.*) *That's* mine. The ones in the other dug-out haven't got any bottoms to them. You keep yourself in by hanging your arms and legs over the sides. Mustn't hang your legs too low, or the rats gnaw your boots.

OSBORNE : You got many rats here ?

HARDY : I should say—roughly—about two million ; but then, of course, I don't see them all. (*He begins to put on his sock and draw on his boot.*) Well, there's nothing else you want to know, is there ?

OSBORNE : You haven't told me anything yet.

HARDY : What else do you *want* to know ?

OSBORNE : Well, what about trench stores ?

HARDY : You *are* a fussy old man. Anybody'd think you were in the Army. (*He finds a tattered piece of paper.*) Here you are : 115 rifle grenades —I shouldn't use them if I were you ; they

upset Jerry and make him offensive. Besides, they are rusty, in any case. Then there's 500 Mills bombs, 34 gum boots——

OSBORNE : That's seventeen pairs——

HARDY : Oh, no ; 25 right leg and 9 left leg. But everything's down here. (*He hands the list to* OSBORNE.)

OSBORNE : Did you check it when you took over ?

HARDY : No. I think the sergeant-major did. It's quite all right.

OSBORNE : I expect Stanhope would like to see you before you go. He always likes a word with the company commander he's relieving.

HARDY : How *is* the dear young boy ? Drinking like a fish, as usual ?

OSBORNE : Why do you say that ?

HARDY : Well, damn it, it's just the natural thing to ask about Stanhope. (*He pauses, and looks curiously at* OSBORNE.) Poor old man. It must be pretty rotten for you, being his second in command, and you such a quiet, sober old thing.

OSBORNE : He's a long way the best company commander we've got.

HARDY : Oh, he's a good chap, I know. But I never *did* see a youngster put away the whiskey he does. D'you know, the last time we were out resting at Valennes he came to supper with us and drank a whole bottle in one hour fourteen minutes—we timed him.

OSBORNE : I suppose it amused everybody ; I suppose everybody cheered him on, and said what a splendid achievement it was.

HARDY : He didn't want any "cheering" on——

OSBORNE : No, but everybody thought it was a big thing to do. (*There is a pause.*) Didn't they ?

HARDY : Well, you can't help, somehow, *admiring* a fellow who can do that—and then pick out his own hat all by himself and walk home——

OSBORNE : When a boy like Stanhope gets a reputation out here for drinking, he turns into a kind of freak show exhibit. People pay with a bottle of whiskey for the morbid curiosity of seeing him drink it.

HARDY : Well, naturally, you're biased. You have to put him to bed when he gets home.

OSBORNE : It rather reminds you of bear-baiting—or cock-fighting—to sit and watch a boy drink himself unconscious.

HARDY : Well, damn it, it's pretty dull without *something* to liven people up. I mean, after all—Stanhope really *is* a sort of freak ; I mean it *is* jolly fascinating to see a fellow drink like he does—glass after glass. He didn't go home on his last leave, did he ?

OSBORNE : No.

HARDY : I suppose he didn't think he was fit to meet papa. (*A pause.*) You know his father's vicar of a country village ?

OSBORNE : I know.

HARDY (*laughing*) : Imagine Stanhope spending his leave in a country vicarage sipping tea ! He spent his last leave in Paris, didn't he ?

OSBORNE : Yes.

HARDY : I bet it was *some* leave !

OSBORNE : Do you know how long he's been out here ?

HARDY : A good time, I know.

OSBORNE : Nearly three years. He came out straight from school—when he was eighteen. He's commanded this company for a year—in and out of the front line. He's never had a rest.

Other men come over here and go home again ill, and young Stanhope goes on sticking it, month in, month out.

HARDY: Oh, I know he's a jolly good fellow——

OSBORNE : I've seen him on his back all day with trench fever—then on duty all night——

HARDY : Oh, I know ; he's a splendid chap !

OSBORNE : And because he's stuck it till his nerves have got battered to bits, he's called a drunkard.

HARDY : Not a drunkard ; just a—just a hard drinker ; but you're quite right about his nerves. They *are* all to blazes. Last time out resting we were playing bridge and something happened—I don't remember what it was ; some silly little argument—and all of a sudden he jumped up and knocked all the glasses off the table ! Lost control of himself ; and then he —sort of—came to—and cried——

OSBORNE : Yes, I know.

HARDY : You heard about it ?

OSBORNE : He told me.

HARDY : Did he ? We tried to hush it up. It just shows the state he's in. (*He rises and puts on his pack. There is a pause.*) You know, Osborne, *you* ought to be commanding this company.

OSBORNE : Rubbish !

HARDY : Of course you ought. It sticks out a mile. I know he's got pluck and all that, but, damn it, man, you're twice his age—and think what a dear, level-headed old thing you are.

OSBORNE : Don't be an ass. He was out here before I joined up. His experience alone makes him worth a dozen people like me.

HARDY : You know as well as I do, you ought to be in command.

OSBORNE : There isn't a man to touch him as a commander of men. He'll command the battalion one day if——

HARDY : Yes, if ! (*He laughs.*)

OSBORNE : You don't know him as I do ; I love that fellow. I'd go to hell with him.

HARDY : Oh, you sweet, sentimental old darling !

OSBORNE : Come along. Finish handing over and stop blithering.

HARDY : There's nothing else to do.

OSBORNE : What about the log-book ?

HARDY : God ! you are a worker. Oh, well. Here we are. (*He finds a tattered little book among the papers on the table.*) Written right up to date ; here's my last entry : " 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. All quiet. German airman flew over trenches. Shot a rat."

OSBORNE : Did he ?

HARDY : No. I shot the rat, you ass. Well, finish up your whiskey. I want to pack my mug. I'll leave you that drop in the bottle.

OSBORNE : Thanks. (*He drinks up his whiskey and hands* HARDY *the mug.*)

HARDY (*tucking the mug into his pack*) : I'll be off.

OSBORNE : Aren't you going to wait and see Stanhope ?

HARDY : Well, no, I don't specially want to see him. He's so fussy about the trenches. I expect they *are* rather dirty. He'll talk for hours if he catches me.

[*He hitches his pack over his shoulders, hangs on his gas satchel, map-case, binoculars, compass-case, until he looks like a travelling pedlar.*

(*As he dresses*) Well, I hope you have a nice six days. Don't forget to change your clothes if you get wet.

OSBORNE : No, papa.

HARDY : And don't forget about the big attack.

OSBORNE : Oh, Lord, no, I mustn't miss that ; I'll make a note in my diary.

HARDY (*fully dressed*) : There we are ! Do I look every inch a soldier ?

OSBORNE : Yes. I should get quite a fright if I were a German and met you coming round a corner.

HARDY : I should bloody well hope you would.

OSBORNE : Shouldn't be able to run away for laughing.

HARDY : Now don't be rude. (*He leans over to light a cigarette from a candle, and looks down on the table.*) Well, I'm damned. Still at it !

OSBORNE : What is ?

HARDY : Why, that earwig. It's been running round and round that candle since tea-time ; must have done a mile.

OSBORNE : I shouldn't hang about here if I were an earwig.

HARDY : Nor should I. I'd go home. Ever had earwig races ?

OSBORNE : No.

HARDY : Great fun. We've had 'em every evening.

OSBORNE : What are the rules ?

HARDY : Oh, you each have an earwig, and start 'em in a line. On the word " Go " you dig your earwig in the ribs and steer him with a match across the table. I won ten francs last night—had a *splendid* earwig. I'll give you a tip.

OSBORNE : Yes ?

HARDY : Promise not to let it go any farther ?

OSBORNE : Yes.

HARDY : Well, if you want to get the best pace out of an earwig, dip it in whiskey—makes 'em go like hell !

OSBORNE : Right. Thanks awfully.

HARDY : Well, I must be off. Cheero !

OSBORNE : Cheero !

[HARDY *goes up the narrow steps into the trench above, singing softly and happily to himself :*

" One and Two, it's with Maud and Lou ;
Three and Four, two girls more——"

The words trail away into the night.

OSBORNE *rises and takes his pack from the floor to the bed by the table. While he undoes it a* SOLDIER SERVANT *comes out of the tunnel from the left with a table-cloth over his arm and a plate with half a loaf of bread on it.*

MASON : Excuse me, sir. Can I lay supper ?

OSBORNE : Yes, do. (*He shuffles up the papers from the table and puts them on the bed.*)

MASON : Thank you, sir. (*He lays the table.*)

OSBORNE : What are you going to tempt us with to-night, Mason ?

MASON : Soup, sir—cutlets—and pineapple.

OSBORNE (*suspiciously*) : Cutlets ?

MASON : Well, sir—well, yes, sir—cutlets.

OSBORNE : What sort of cutlets ?

MASON : Now, sir, you've got me. I shouldn't like to commit meself too deep, sir.

OSBORNE : Ordinary ration meat ?

MASON : Yes, sir. Ordinary ration meat, but a noo shape, sir. Smells like liver, sir, but it 'asn't got that smooth, wet look that liver's got.

[MASON *leaves the dug-out.*

OSBORNE *sits up to the table and examines the map. Voices come from the trench above; a gruff voice says:* "This is 'C' Company 'Ead-quarters, sir."

A boyish voice replies: "Oh, thanks."

There is a pause, then the gruff voice says: "Better go down, sir."

The boyish voice replies: "Yes. Righto."

AN OFFICER *comes groping down the steps and stands in the candle-light. He looks round, a little bewildered. He is a well-built, healthy-looking boy of about eighteen, with the very new uniform of a 2nd lieutenant.*

OSBORNE *looks up from the trench map, surprised and interested to see a stranger.*

OSBORNE: Hullo!

RALEIGH: Good evening (*he notices* OSBORNE'S *grey hair and adds:*) sir.

OSBORNE: You the new officer?

RALEIGH: Er—yes. I've been to Battalion Head-quarters. They told me to report here.

OSBORNE: Good. We've been expecting you. Sit down, won't you?

RALEIGH: Thanks. (*He sits gingerly on the box opposite* OSBORNE.)

OSBORNE: I should take your pack off.

RALEIGH: Oh, right. (*He slips his pack from his shoulders.*)

OSBORNE: Will you have a drink?

RALEIGH: Er—well——

OSBORNE: You don't drink whiskey?

RALEIGH (*hastily*): Oh, yes—er—just a small one, sir.

OSBORNE (*pouring out a small whiskey and adding water*): Whiskey takes away the taste of the water——

RALEIGH : Oh, yes ? (*He pauses, and laughs nervously.*)

OSBORNE : —and the water takes away the taste of the whiskey. (*He hands* RALEIGH *the drink.*) Just out from England ?

RALEIGH : Yes, I landed a week ago.

OSBORNE : Boulogne ?

RALEIGH : Yes. (*A pause, then he self-consciously holds up his drink.*) Well, here's luck, sir.

OSBORNE (*taking a drink himself*) : Good luck. (*He takes out a cigarette case.*) Cigarette ?

RALEIGH : Thanks.

OSBORNE (*holding a bottle across so that* RALEIGH *can light his cigarette from the candle in it*) : Ever been up in the line before ?

RALEIGH : Oh, no. You see, I only left school at the end of last summer term.

OSBORNE : I expect you find it a bit strange.

RALEIGH (*laughing*) : Yes—I do—a bit——

OSBORNE : My name's Osborne. I'm second in command of the company. You only call me " sir " in front of the men.

RALEIGH : I see. Thanks.

OSBORNE : You'll find the other officers call me " Uncle."

RALEIGH : Oh, yes ? (*He smiles.*)

OSBORNE : What's *your* name ?

RALEIGH : Raleigh.

OSBORNE : I knew a Raleigh. A master at Rugby.

RALEIGH : Oh ? He may be a relation. I don't know. I've got lots of uncles and—and things like that.

OSBORNE : We've only just moved into these trenches. Captain Stanhope commands the company.

RALEIGH (*suddenly brightening up*) : I know. It's a frightful bit of luck.

OSBORNE : Why ? D'you know him ?

RALEIGH : Yes, rather ! We were at school together—at least—of course—I was only a kid and he was one of the big fellows ; he's three years older than I am.

[*There is a pause ;* OSBORNE *seems to be waiting for* RALEIGH *to go on, then suddenly he says :*

OSBORNE : He's up in the front line at present, looking after the relief. (*Another pause.*) He's a splendid chap.

RALEIGH : *Isn't* he ? He was skipper of Rugger at Barford, and kept wicket for the eleven. A jolly good bat, too.

OSBORNE : Did you play Rugger—and cricket ?

RALEIGH : Oh, yes. Of course, I wasn't in the same class as Dennis—I say, I suppose I ought to call him Captain Stanhope ?

OSBORNE : Just " Stanhope."

RALEIGH : I see. Thanks.

OSBORNE : Did you get your colours ?

RALEIGH : I did for Rugger. Not cricket.

OSBORNE : Rugger and cricket seem a long way from here.

RALEIGH (*laughing*) : They do, rather.

OSBORNE : We play a bit of soccer when we're out of the line.

RALEIGH : Good !

OSBORNE (*thoughtfully*) : So you were at school with Stanhope. (*Pause.*) I wonder if he'll remember you ? I expect you've grown in the last three years.

RALEIGH : Oh, I think he'll remember me. (*He stops, and goes on rather awkwardly*) You see, it wasn't only that we were just at school together ;

our fathers were friends, and Dennis used to come and stay with us in the holidays. Of course, at school I didn't see much of him, but in the holidays we were terrific pals.

OSBORNE : He's a fine company commander.

RALEIGH : I bet he is. Last time he was on leave he came down to the school ; he'd just got his M.C. and been made a captain. He looked splendid ! It—sort of—made me feel——

OSBORNE : —keen ?

RALEIGH : Yes. Keen to get out here. I was frightfully keen to get into Dennis's regiment. I thought, perhaps, with a bit of luck I might get to the same battalion.

OSBORNE : It's a big fluke to have got to the same company.

RALEIGH : I know. It's an amazing bit of luck. When I was at the base I did an awful thing. You see, my uncle's at the base—he has to detail officers to regiments——

OSBORNE : General Raleigh ?

RALEIGH : Yes. I went to see him on the quiet and asked him if he could get me into this battalion. He bit my head off, and said I'd got to be treated like everybody else——

OSBORNE : Yes ?

RALEIGH : —and next day I was told I *was* coming to this battalion. Funny, wasn't it ?

OSBORNE : Extraordinary coincidence !

RALEIGH : And when I got to Battalion Headquarters, and the colonel told me to report to " C " Company, I could have cheered. I expect Dennis'll be frightfully surprised to see me. I've got a message for him.

OSBORNE : From the colonel ?

RALEIGH : No. From my sister.

OSBORNE : Your sister ?

RALEIGH : Yes. You see, Dennis used to stay with us, and naturally my sister (*he hesitates*)—well—perhaps I ought not——

OSBORNE : That's all right. I didn't actually know that Stanhope——

RALEIGH : They're not — er — officially engaged——

OSBORNE : No ?

RALEIGH : She'll be awfully glad I'm with him here ; I can write and tell her all about him. He doesn't say much in his letters ; can we write often ?

OSBORNE : Oh, yes. Letters are collected every day.

[*There is a pause.*

RALEIGH : You don't think Dennis'll mind my —sort of—forcing myself into his company ? I never thought of that ; I was so keen.

OSBORNE : No, of course he won't. (*Pause.*) You say it's—it's a good time since you last saw him ?

RALEIGH : Let's see. It was in the summer last year—nearly a year ago.

OSBORNE : You know, Raleigh, you mustn't expect to find him—quite the same.

RALEIGH : Oh ?

OSBORNE : You see, he's been out here a long time. It—it tells on a man—rather badly——

RALEIGH (*thinking*) : Yes, of course, I suppose it does.

OSBORNE : You may find he's—he's a little bit quick-tempered.

RALEIGH (*laughing*) : Oh, I know old Dennis's temper ! I remember once at school he caught some chaps in a study with a bottle of whiskey. Lord ! the roof nearly blew off. He gave them a dozen each with a cricket stump.

[OSBORNE *laughs.*

He was so keen on the fellows in the house keeping fit. He was frightfully down on smoking—and that sort of thing.

OSBORNE : You must remember he's commanded this company for a long time—through all sorts of rotten times. It's—it's a big strain on a man.

RALEIGH : Oh, it must be.

OSBORNE : If you notice a—difference in Stanhope—you'll know it's only the strain——

RALEIGH : Oh, yes.

[OSBORNE *rouses himself and speaks briskly.*

OSBORNE : Now, let's see. We've got five beds here—one each. Two in here and three in that dug-out there. I'm afraid you'll have to wait until the others come and pick the beds they want.

RALEIGH : Righto !

OSBORNE : Have you got a blanket ?

RALEIGH : Yes, in my pack. (*He rises to get it.*)

OSBORNE : Better wait and unpack when you know where you are sleeping.

RALEIGH : Righto ! (*He sits down again.*)

OSBORNE : We never undress when we're in the line. You can take your boots off now and then in the daytime, but it's better to keep pretty well dressed always.

RALEIGH : I see. Thanks.

OSBORNE : I expect we shall each do about three hours on duty at a time and then six off. We all go on duty at stand-to. That's at dawn and dusk.

RALEIGH : Yes.

OSBORNE : I expect Stanhope'll send you on duty with one of us at first—till you get used to it.

[*There is a pause.* RALEIGH *turns, and looks curiously up the steps into the night.*

RALEIGH : Are we in the front line here ?

OSBORNE : No. That's the support line outside. The front line's about fifty yards farther on.

RALEIGH : How frightfully quiet it is !

OSBORNE : It's often quiet—like this.

RALEIGH : I thought there would be an awful row here—all the time.

OSBORNE : Most people think that.

[*Pause.*

RALEIGH : I've never known anything so quiet as those trenches we came by ; just now and then I heard rifle firing, like the range at Bisley, and a sort of rumble in the distance.

OSBORNE : Those are the guns up north—up Wipers way. The guns are always going up there ; it's never quiet like this. (*Pause.*) I expect it's all very strange to you ?

RALEIGH : It's—it's not exactly what I thought. It's just this—this quiet that seems so funny.

OSBORNE : A hundred yards from here the Germans are sitting in *their* dug-outs, thinking how quiet it is.

RALEIGH : Are they as near as that ?

OSBORNE : About a hundred yards.

RALEIGH : It seems—uncanny. It makes me feel we're—we're all just waiting for something.

OSBORNE : We are, generally, just waiting for something. When anything happens, it happens quickly. Then we just start waiting again.

RALEIGH : I never thought it was like that.

OSBORNE : You thought it was fighting all the time ?

RALEIGH (*laughing*) : Well, yes, in a way.

OSBORNE (*after puffing at his pipe in silence for a while*) : Did you come up by trench to-night—or over the top ?

RALEIGH : By trench. An amazing trench—turning and twisting for miles, over a sort of plain.

OSBORNE : Lancer's Alley it's called.

RALEIGH : Is it ? It's funny the way it begins—in that ruined village, a few steps down into the cellar of a house—then right under the house and through a little garden—and then under the garden wall—then alongside an enormous ruined factory place—then miles and miles of plains, with those green lights bobbing up and down ahead—all along the front as far as you can see.

OSBORNE : Those are the Very lights. Both sides fire them over No Man's Land—to watch for raids and patrols.

RALEIGH : I knew they fired lights. (*Pause.*) I didn't expect so many—and to see them so far away.

OSBORNE : I know. (*He puffs at his pipe.*) There's something rather romantic about it all.

RALEIGH (*eagerly*) : Yes. I thought that, too.

OSBORNE : You must always think of it like that if you can. Think of it all as—as romantic. It helps.

[MASON *comes in with more dinner utensils.*

MASON : D'you expect the captain soon, sir? The soup's 'ot.

OSBORNE : He ought to be here very soon now. This is Mr. Raleigh, Mason.

MASON : Good evening, sir.

RALEIGH : Good evening.

MASON (*to* OSBORNE) : I've 'ad rather a unpleasant surprise, sir.

OSBORNE : What's happened ?

MASON : You know that tin o' pineapple chunks I got, sir ?

OSBORNE : Yes ?

MASON : Well, sir, I'm sorry to say it's apricots.

OSBORNE : Good heavens ! It must have given you a turn.

MASON : I distinctly said " Pineapple chunks " at the canteen.

OSBORNE : Wasn't there a label on the tin ?

MASON : No, sir. I pointed that out to the men. I said was 'e *certain* it was pineapple chunks ?

OSBORNE : I suppose he said he was.

MASON : Yes, sir. 'E said a leopard can't change its spots, sir.

OSBORNE : What have leopards got to do with pineapple ?

MASON : That's just what *I* thought, sir. Made me *think* there was something fishy about it. You see, sir, I know the captain can't stand the sight of apricots. 'E said next time we 'ad them 'e'd wring my neck.

OSBORNE : Haven't you anything else ?

MASON : There's a pink blancmange I've made, sir. But it ain't anywhere near stiff yet.

OSBORNE : Never mind. We must have the apricots and chance it.

MASON : Only I thought I'd tell you, sir, so as the captain wouldn't blame me.

OSBORNE : All right, Mason.

[*Voices are heard in the trench above.*

That sounds like the captain coming now.

MASON (*hastening away*) : I'll go and dish out the soup, sir.

[*The voices grow nearer ; two figures appear in the trench above and grope down the steps—the leading figure tall and thin, the other short and fat. The tall figure is* CAPTAIN STANHOPE. *At the bottom of the steps he straightens himself, pulls off his pack, and drops it on the floor. Then he takes off his helmet and throws it on the right-hand bed. Despite his stars of rank he is no more than a boy ; tall, slimly built, but broad-shouldered. His dark hair is carefully brushed ; his uniform, though old and war-stained, is well cut and cared for. He is good-looking, rather from attractive features than the healthy good looks of* RALEIGH. *Although tanned by months in the open air, there is a pallor under his skin and dark shadows under his eyes. His short and fat companion—*2ND LIEUTENANT TROTTER—*is middle-aged and homely looking. His face is red, fat, and round ; apparently he has put on weight during his war service, for his tunic appears to be on the verge of bursting at the waist. He carries an extra pack belonging to the officer left on duty in the line.*

STANHOPE (*as he takes off his pack, gas satchel, and belt*) : Has Hardy gone ?

OSBORNE : Yes. He cleared off a few minutes ago.

STANHOPE : Lucky for him he did. I had a few words to say to Master Hardy. You never saw the blasted mess those fellows left the trenches in. Dug-outs smell like cess-pits ; rusty bombs ; damp rifle grenades ; it's perfectly foul. Where are the servants ?

OSBORNE : In there.

STANHOPE (*calling into* MASON'S *dug-out*) : Hi ! Mason !

MASON (*outside*) : Coming, sir ! Just bringing the soup, sir.

STANHOPE (*taking a cigarette from his case and lighting it*) : Damn the soup ! Bring some whiskey !

OSBORNE : Here's a new officer, Stanhope—just arrived.

STANHOPE : Oh, sorry. (*He turns and peers into the dim corner where* RALEIGH *stands smiling awkwardly.*) I didn't see you in this miserable light. (*He stops short at the sight of* RALEIGH. *There is silence.*)

RALEIGH : Hullo, Stanhope !

[STANHOPE *stares at* RALEIGH *as though dazed.* RALEIGH *takes a step forward, half raises his hand, then lets it drop to his side.*

STANHOPE (*in a low voice*) : How did you—get here ?

RALEIGH : I was told to report to your company, Stanhope.

STANHOPE : Oh. I see. Rather a coincidence.

RALEIGH (*with a nervous laugh*) : Yes.

[*There is a silence for a moment, broken by* OSBORNE *in a matter-of-fact voice.*

OSBORNE : I say, Stanhope, it's a terrible business. We thought we'd got a tin of pineapple chunks ; it turns out to be apricots.

TROTTER : Ha ! Give me apricots every time ! I 'ate pineapple chunks ; too bloomin' sickly for me !

RALEIGH : I'm awfully glad I got to your company, Stanhope.

STANHOPE : When did you get here ?

RALEIGH : Well, I've only just come.

OSBORNE : He came up with the transport while you were taking over.

STANHOPE : I see.

[MASON *brings in a bottle of whiskey, a mug, and two plates of soup—so precariously that* OSBORNE *has to help with the soup plates on to the table.*

STANHOPE (*with sudden forced gaiety*) : Come along, Uncle ! Come and sit here. (*He waves towards the box on the right of the table.*) You better sit there, Raleigh.

RALEIGH : Right !

TROTTER (*taking a pair of pince-nez from his tunic pocket, putting them on, and looking curiously at* RALEIGH) : You Raleigh ?

RALEIGH : Yes.

[*Pause.*

TROTTER : I'm Trotter.

RALEIGH : Oh, yes ?

[*Pause.*

TROTTER : How *are* you ?

RALEIGH : Oh, all right, thanks.

TROTTER : Been out 'ere before ?

RALEIGH : No.

TROTTER : Feel a bit odd, I s'pose ?

RALEIGH : Yes. A bit.

TROTTER (*getting a box to sit on*) : Oh, well, you'll soon get used to it ; you'll feel you've been 'ere a year in about an hour's time. (*He puts the box on its side and sits on it. It is too low for the table, and he puts it on its end. It is then too high. He tries the other side, which is too low ; he finally contrives to make himself comfortable by sitting on his pack, placed on the side of the box.*)

[MASON *arrives with two more plates of soup.*

OSBORNE : What kind of soup is this, Mason ?

MASON : It's yellow soup, sir.

OSBORNE : It's got a very deep yellow flavour.

TROTTER (*taking a melodious sip*) : It wants some pepper ; bring some pepper, Mason.

MASON (*anxiously*) : I'm very sorry, sir. When the mess box was packed the pepper was omitted, sir.

TROTTER (*throwing his spoon with a clatter into the plate*) : Oh, I say, but damn it !

OSBORNE : We must have pepper. It's a disinfectant.

TROTTER : You must have pepper in soup !

STANHOPE (*quietly*) : Why wasn't it packed, Mason ?

MASON : It—it was missed, sir.

STANHOPE : Why ?

MASON (*miserably*) : Well, sir, I left it to——

STANHOPE : Then I advise you never to leave it to anyone else again—unless you want to rejoin your platoon out there. (*He points into the moonlit trench.*)

MASON : I'm—I'm very sorry, sir.

STANHOPE : Send one of the signallers.

MASON : Yes, sir.

[*He hastens to the tunnel entrance and calls :* Bert, you're wanted !

[*A* SOLDIER *appears, with a rifle slung over his shoulder. He stands stiffly to attention.*

STANHOPE : Do you know "A" Company Headquarters ?

SOLDIER : Yes, sir.

STANHOPE : Go there at once and ask Captain Willis, with my compliments, if he can lend me a little pepper.

SOLDIER : Very good, sir.

[*He turns smartly and goes up the steps,* MASON *stopping him for a moment to say confidentially :* "A *screw* of pepper, you ask for."

OSBORNE : We must have pepper.

TROTTER : I mean—after all—war's bad enough *with* pepper—(*noisy sip*)—but war without pepper—it's—it's bloody awful !

OSBORNE : What's it like outside ?

TROTTER : Quiet as an empty 'ouse. There's a nasty noise going on up north.

OSBORNE : Wipers, I expect. I believe there's trouble up there. I wish we knew more of what's going on.

TROTTER : So do I. Still, my wife reads the papers every morning and writes and tells me.

OSBORNE : Hardy says they had a lively time here yesterday. Three big Minnies right in the trench.

TROTTER : I know. And they left the bloomin' 'oles for us to fill in.

[MASON *arrives with cutlets on enamel plates.*

What's this ?

MASON : Meat, sir.

TROTTER : I know that. What sort ?

MASON : Sort of cutlet, sir.

TROTTER : Sort of cutlet, is it ? You know, Mason, there's cutlets and cutlets.

MASON : I know, sir ; that one's a cutlet.

TROTTER : Well, it won't let me cut it.

MASON : No, sir ?

TROTTER : That's a joke.

MASON : Oh. Right, sir.

[*He goes out.*

OSBORNE (*studying the map*) : There's a sort of ruin marked on this map—just in front of here, in No Man's Land—called Beauvais Farm.

TROTTER : That's what we saw sticking up, skipper. I wondered what it was.

STANHOPE : Better go out and look at it to-night.

TROTTER : I expect a nasty German'll 'op out of it and say, " Ock der Kaiser." I 'ate ruins in No Man's Land.

OSBORNE : There's only about sixty yards of No Man's Land, according to this map—narrower on the left, from the head of this sap ; only about fifty.

TROTTER (*who has been looking curiously at* STANHOPE, *eating his meal with lowered head*) : Cheer up, skipper. You *do* look glum !

STANHOPE : I'm tired.

OSBORNE : I should turn in and get some sleep after supper.

STANHOPE : I've got hours of work before I sleep.

OSBORNE : I'll do the duty roll and see the sergeant-major—and all that.

STANHOPE : That's all right, Uncle. I'll see to it. (*He turns to* RALEIGH *for the first time.*) Trotter goes on duty directly he's had supper. You better go on with him—to learn.

RALEIGH : Oh, right.

TROTTER : Look 'ere, skipper, it's nearly eight now ; couldn't we make it 'alf-past ?

STANHOPE : No. I told Hibbert he'd be relieved at eight. Will you take from eleven till two, Uncle ?

OSBORNE : Right.

STANHOPE : Hibbert can do from two till four, and I'll go on from then till stand-to. That'll be at six.

TROTTER : Well, boys ! 'Ere we are for six days again. Six bloomin' eternal days. (*He makes a calculation on the table.*) That's a hundred and forty-four hours ; eight thousand six 'undred and forty minutes. *That* doesn't sound so bad ; we've done twenty of 'em already. I've got an idea ! I'm going to draw a hundred and forty-four little circles on a bit o' paper, and every hour I'm going to black one in ; that'll make the time go all right.

STANHOPE : It's five to eight now. You better go and relieve Hibbert. Then you can come back at eleven o'clock and black in three of your bloody little circles.

TROTTER : I 'aven't 'ad my apricots yet !

STANHOPE : We'll keep your apricots till you come back.

TROTTER : I never knew anything like a war for upsetting meals. I'm always down for dooty in the middle of one.

STANHOPE : That's because you never stop eating.

TROTTER : Any'ow, let's 'ave some coffee. Hi ! Mason ! Coffee !

MASON : Coming, sir !

TROTTER (*getting up*) : Well, I'll get dressed. Come on, Raleigh.

RALEIGH (*rising quickly*) : Right !

TROTTER : Just wear your belt with revolver case on it. Must have your revolver to shoot rats. And your gas mask—come here—I'll show you. (*He helps* RALEIGH.) You wear it sort of tucked up under your chin like a serviette.

RALEIGH : Yes. I was shown the way at home.

TROTTER : Now your hat. That's right. You don't want a walking-stick. It gets in your way if you have to run fast.

RALEIGH : Why—er—do you have to run fast ?

TROTTER : Oh, Lord, yes, often ! If you see a Minnie coming—that's a big trench-mortar shell, you know—short for *Minnywerfer*—you see 'em come right out of the Boche trenches, right up in the air, then down, down, down ; and you have to judge it and run like stink sometimes.

[MASON *comes in with two cups of coffee.*

MASON : Coffee, sir ?

TROTTER : Thanks. (*He takes the cup and drinks standing up.*)

RALEIGH : Thanks.

TROTTER : You might leave my apricots out, Mason. Put 'em on a separate plate and keep 'em in there. (*He points to* MASON's *dug-out.*)

MASON : Very good, sir.

TROTTER : If you bring 'em in 'ere you never know *what* might 'appen to 'em.

MASON : No, sir.

TROTTER : " B " Company on our right, aren't they, skipper ?

STANHOPE : Yes. There's fifty yards of undefended area between. You better patrol that a good deal.

TROTTER : Aye, aye, sir.

STANHOPE : Have a look at that Lewis gun position on the left. See what field of fire they've got.

TROTTER : Aye, aye, sir. You don't want me to go out and look at that blinkin' ruin ?

STANHOPE : I'll see to that.

TROTTER : Good. I don't fancy crawling about on my belly after that cutlet. (*To* RALEIGH) Well, come on, my lad, let's go and see about this 'ere war.

[*The two go up the steps, leaving* STANHOPE *and* OSBORNE *alone.*

MASON *appears at his dug-out door.*

MASON : Will you take apricots, sir ?

STANHOPE : No, thanks.

MASON : Mr. Osborne ?

OSBORNE : No, thanks.

MASON : I'm sorry about them being apricots, sir. I explained to Mr. Osborne——

STANHOPE (*curtly*) : That's all right, Mason—thank you.

MASON : Very good, sir.

[*He goes out.*

OSBORNE (*over by the right-hand bed*) : Will you sleep here ? This was Hardy's bed.

STANHOPE : No. You sleep there. I'd rather sleep by the table here. I can get up and work without disturbing you.

OSBORNE : This is a better one.

STANHOPE : You take it. Must have a little comfort in your old age, Uncle.

OSBORNE : I wish you'd turn in and sleep for a bit.

STANHOPE : Sleep ?—I can't sleep. (*He takes a whiskey and water.*)

[*A man appears in the trench and comes down the steps—a small, slightly built man in the early twenties, with a little moustache and a pallid face.*

(*Looking hard at the newcomer*) Well, Hibbert ?

HIBBERT : Everything's fairly quiet. Bit of sniping somewhere to our left ; some rifle grenades coming over just on our right.

STANHOPE : I see. Mason's got your supper.

HIBBERT (*gently rubbing his forehead*) : I don't think I can manage any supper to-night, Stanhope. It's this beastly neuralgia. It seems to be right inside this eye. The beastly pain gets worse every day.

STANHOPE : Some hot soup and a good tough chop'll put that right.

HIBBERT : I'm afraid the pain rather takes my appetite away. I'm damn sorry to keep on talking about it, Stanhope, only I thought you'd wonder why I don't eat anything much.

STANHOPE : Try and forget about it.

HIBBERT (*with a little laugh*) : Well—I wish I could.

STANHOPE : Get tight.

HIBBERT : I think I'll turn straight in for a rest —and try and get some sleep.

STANHOPE : All right. Turn in. You're in that dug-out there. Here's your pack. (*He picks up the pack that* TROTTER *brought down.*) You go on duty at two. I take over from you at four. I'll tell Mason to call you.

HIBBERT (*faintly*) : Oh, right—thanks, Stanhope —cheero.

STANHOPE : Cheero. (*He watches* HIBBERT *go down the tunnel into the dark.*)

HIBBERT (*returning*) : Can I have a candle ?

STANHOPE (*taking one from the table*) : Here you are.

HIBBERT : Thanks.

[*He goes out again. There is silence.* STANHOPE *turns to* OSBORNE.

STANHOPE : Another little worm trying to wriggle home.

OSBORNE (*filling his pipe*) : I wonder if he really is bad. He looks rotten.

STANHOPE : Pure bloody funk, that's all. He could eat if he wanted to ; he's starving himself purposely. Artful little swine ! Neuralgia's a splendid idea. No proof, as far as I can see.

OSBORNE : You can't help feeling sorry for him. I think he's tried hard.

STANHOPE : How long's he been out here ? Three months, I suppose. Now he's decided he's done his bit. He's decided to go home and spend the rest of the war in comfortable nerve hospitals. Well, he's mistaken. I let Warren get away like that, but no more.

OSBORNE : I don't see how you can prevent a fellow going sick.

STANHOPE : I'll have a quiet word with the doctor before *he* does. He thinks he's going to wriggle off before the attack. We'll just see about that. No man of mine's going sick before the attack. They're going to take an equal chance—together.

OSBORNE : Raleigh looks a nice chap.

STANHOPE (*looking hard at* OSBORNE *before replying*) : Yes.

OSBORNE : Good-looking youngster. At school with you, wasn't he ?

STANHOPE : Has he been talking already ?

OSBORNE : He just mentioned it. It was a natural thing to tell me when he knew you were in command.

[STANHOPE *is lounging at the table with his back to the wall.* OSBORNE, *sitting on the right-hand bed, begins to puff clouds of smoke into the air as he lights his pipe.*

He's awfully pleased to get into your company.

[STANHOPE *makes no reply. He picks up a pencil and scribbles on the back of a magazine.*

He seems to think a lot of you.

STANHOPE (*looking up quickly at* OSBORNE *and laughing*) : Yes, I'm his hero.

OSBORNE : It's quite natural.

STANHOPE : You think so ?

OSBORNE : Small boys at school generally have their heroes.

STANHOPE : Yes. Small boys at school do.

OSBORNE : Often it goes on as long as——

STANHOPE : —as long as the hero's a hero.

OSBORNE : It often goes on all through life.

STANHOPE : I wonder. How many battalions are there in France ?

OSBORNE : Why ?

STANHOPE : We'll say fifty divisions. That's a hundred and fifty brigades—four hundred and fifty battalions. That's one thousand eight hundred companies. (*He looks up at* OSBORNE *from his calculations on the magazine cover.*) There are one thousand eight hundred companies in France, Uncle. Raleigh might have been sent to any one of those, and, my God ! he comes to mine.

OSBORNE : You ought to be glad. He's a good-looking youngster. I like him.

STANHOPE : I knew you'd like him. Personality, isn't it ? (*He takes a worn leather case from his breast pocket and hands a small photograph to* OSBORNE.) I've never shown you that, have I ?

OSBORNE (*looking at the photograph*) : No. (*Pause.*) Raleigh's sister, isn't it ?

STANHOPE : How did you know ?

OSBORNE : There's a strong likeness.

STANHOPE : I suppose there is.

OSBORNE (*intent on the picture*) : She's an awfully nice-looking girl.

STANHOPE : A photo doesn't show much, really. Just a face.

OSBORNE : She looks awfully nice.

[*There is silence.* STANHOPE *lights a cigarette.* OSBORNE *hands the photo back.*

You're a lucky chap.

STANHOPE (*putting the photo back into his case*) : I don't know why I keep it, really.

OSBORNE : Why ? Isn't she—I thought——

STANHOPE : What did you think ?

OSBORNE : Well, I thought that perhaps she was waiting for you.

STANHOPE : Yes. She is waiting for me—and she doesn't know. She thinks I'm a wonderful chap —commanding a company. (*He turns to* OSBORNE *and points up the steps into the line.*) She doesn't know that if I went up those steps into the front line—without being doped with whiskey—I'd go mad with fright.

[*There is a pause.* OSBORNE *stirs himself to speak.*

OSBORNE : Look here, old man. I've meant to say it, for a long time, but it sounds damned impudence. You've done longer out here than any man in the battalion. It's time you went away for a rest. It's due to you.

STANHOPE : You suggest that I go sick, like that little worm in there—neuralgia in the eye ? (*He laughs and takes a drink.*)

OSBORNE : No. Not that. The colonel would have sent you down long ago, only——

STANHOPE : Only—what ?

OSBORNE : Only he can't spare you.

STANHOPE (*laughing*) : Oh, rot !

OSBORNE : He told me.

STANHOPE : He thinks I'm in such a state I want a rest, is that it ?

OSBORNE : No. He thinks it's due to you.

STANHOPE : It's all right, Uncle. I'll stick it out now. It may not be much longer now. I've had my share of luck—more than my share. There's not a man left who was here when I came. But it's rather damnable for that boy—of all the boys in the world—to have come to *me*. I might at least have been spared that.

OSBORNE : You're looking at things in rather a black sort of way.

STANHOPE : I've just told you. That boy's a hero-worshipper. I'm three years older than he is.

You know what that means at school. I was skipper of Rugger and all that sort of thing. It doesn't sound much to a man out here—but it does at school with a kid of fourteen. Damn it, Uncle, you're a schoolmaster ; you know.

OSBORNE : I've just told you what I think of hero-worship.

STANHOPE : Raleigh's father knew mine, and I was told to keep an eye on the kid. I rather liked the idea of looking after him. I made him keen on the right things—and all that. His people asked me to stay with them one summer. I met his sister then——

OSBORNE : Yes ?

STANHOPE : At first I thought of her as another kid like Raleigh. It was just before I came out here for the first time that I realised what a topping girl she was. Funny how you realise it suddenly. I just prayed to come through the war—and—and *do* things—and keep absolutely fit for her.

OSBORNE : You've done pretty well. An M.C. and a company.

STANHOPE (*taking another whiskey*) : It was all right at first. When I went home on leave after six months it was jolly fine to feel I'd done a little to make her pleased. (*He takes a gulp of his drink.*) It was after I came back here—in that awful affair on Vimy Ridge. I knew I'd go mad if I didn't break the strain. I couldn't bear being fully conscious all the time—*you've* felt that, Uncle, haven't you ?

OSBORNE : Yes, often.

STANHOPE : There were only two ways of breaking the strain. One was pretending I was ill—and going home ; the other was this. (*He holds up his glass.*) Which would you pick, Uncle ?

OSBORNE : I haven't been through as much as you. I don't know yet.

STANHOPE : I thought it all out. It's a slimy thing to go home if you're not really ill, isn't it ?

OSBORNE : I think it is.

STANHOPE : Well, then. (*He holds his glass up to* OSBORNE) Cheero, and long live the men who go home with neuralgia. (*He puts his glass down.*) I didn't go home on my last leave. I couldn't bear to meet her, in case she realised——

OSBORNE : When the war's over—and the strain's gone—you'll soon be as fit as ever, at your age.

STANHOPE : I've hoped that all the time. I'd go away for months and live in the open air—and get fit—and then go back to her.

OSBORNE : And so you can.

STANHOPE : If Raleigh had gone to one of those other one thousand eight hundred companies.

OSBORNE : I don't see why you should think——

STANHOPE : Oh, for Lord's sake don't be a damn fool. *You* know ! You know he'll write and tell her I reek of whiskey all day.

OSBORNE : Why should he ? He's not a——

STANHOPE : Exactly. He's not a damned little swine who'd deceive his sister.

OSBORNE : He's very young ; he's got hundreds of strange things to learn ; he'll realise that men are—*different*—out here.

STANHOPE : It's no good, Uncle. Didn't you see him sitting there at supper ?—staring at me ?—and wondering ? He's up in those trenches now—still wondering—and beginning to understand. And all these months he's wanted to be with me out here. Poor little devil !

OSBORNE : I believe Raleigh'll go on liking you—and looking up to you—through everything. There's something very deep, and rather fine, about hero-worship.

STANHOPE : Hero-worship be damned ! (*He pauses, then goes on, in a strange, high-pitched voice*) You know, Uncle, I'm an *awful* fool. I'm *captain* of this company. What's that bloody little prig of a boy matter ? D'you see ? He's a little prig. Wants to write home and tell Madge all about *me*. Well, he won't ; d'you see, Uncle ? He *won't* write. Censorship ! I censor his letters—cross out all he says about me.

OSBORNE : You can't read his letters.

STANHOPE (*dreamily*) : Cross out all he says about me. Then we all go west in the big attack—and she goes on thinking I'm a fine fellow for ever—and ever—and ever. (*He pours out a drink, murmuring "Ever—and ever—and ever."*)

OSBORNE (*rising from his bed*) : It's not as bad as all that. Turn in and have a sleep.

STANHOPE : Sleep ! Catch *me* wasting my time with sleep.

OSBORNE (*picking up* STANHOPE'S *pack and pulling out the blanket*) : Come along, old chap. You come and lie down here. (*He puts the pack as a pillow on* STANHOPE'S *bed, and spreads out the blanket.*)

STANHOPE (*with his chin in his hands*) : Little prig—that's what he is. Did *I* ask him to force his way into my company ? No ! I didn't. Very well, he'll pay for his damn cheek.

[OSBORNE *lays his hand gently on* STANHOPE'S *shoulder to persuade him to lie down.*

Go away ! (*He shakes* OSBORNE'S *hand off.*) What the hell are you trying to do ?

OSBORNE : Come and lie down and go to sleep.

STANHOPE : Go sleep y'self. I censor his letters, d'you see, Uncle ? You watch and see he doesn't smuggle any letters away.

OSBORNE : Righto. Now come and lie down. You've had a hard day of it.

STANHOPE (*looking up suddenly*) : Where's Hardy? D'you say he's gone?

OSBORNE : Yes. He's gone.

STANHOPE : Gone, has he? Y'know, I had a word to say to Master Hardy. He would go, the swine! Dirty trenches—everything dirty—I wanner tell him to keep his trenches clean.

OSBORNE (*standing beside* STANHOPE *and putting his hand gently on his shoulder again*) : We'll clean them up to-morrow.

[STANHOPE *looks up at* OSBORNE *and laughs gaily.*

STANHOPE : Dear old Uncle! Clean trenches up—with little dustpan and brush. (*He laughs.*) Make you little apron—with lace on it.

OSBORNE : That'll be fine. Now then, come along, old chap. I'll see you get called at two o'clock. (*He firmly takes* STANHOPE *by the arm and draws him over to the bed.*) You *must* be tired.

STANHOPE (*in a dull voice*) : God, I'm bloody tired; ache—all over—feel sick.

[OSBORNE *helps him on to the bed, takes the blanket and puts it over him.*

OSBORNE : You'll feel all right in a minute. How's that? Comfortable?

STANHOPE : Yes. Comfortable. (*He looks up into* OSBORNE'S *face and laughs again.*) Dear old Uncle. Tuck me up.

[OSBORNE *fumbles the blankets round* STANHOPE.

OSBORNE : There we are.

STANHOPE : Kiss me, Uncle.

OSBORNE : Kiss you be blowed! You go to sleep.

STANHOPE (*closing his eyes*) : Yes—I go sleep. (*He turns slowly on to his side with his face to the earth wall.*)

[OSBORNE *stands watching for a while, then blows out the candle by* STANHOPE'S *bed.* STANHOPE *gives a deep sigh, and begins to breathe heavily.* OSBORNE *goes to the servant's dug-out and calls softly :*

OSBORNE : Mason !

MASON (*appearing with unbuttoned tunic at the tunnel entrance*) : Yessir ?

OSBORNE : Will you call me at ten minutes to eleven—and Mr. Hibbert at ten minutes to two ? I'm going to turn in for a little while.

MASON : Very good, sir. (*Pause.*) The pepper's come, sir.

OSBORNE : Oh, good.

MASON : I'm very sorry about the pepper, sir.

OSBORNE : That's all right, Mason.

MASON : Good night, sir.

OSBORNE : Good night.

[MASON *leaves the dug-out.* OSBORNE *turns, and looks up the narrow steps into the night, where the Very lights rise and fade against the starlit sky. He glances once more at* STANHOPE, *then crosses to his own bed, takes out from his tunic pocket a large, old-fashioned watch, and quietly winds it up.*

Through the stillness comes the low rumble of distant guns.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE I

Early next morning.

A pale shaft of sunlight shines down the steps, but candles still burn in the dark corner where OSBORNE *and* RALEIGH *are at breakfast.* MASON *has put a large plate of bacon before each, and turns to go as* TROTTER *comes down the steps, whistling gaily and rubbing his hands.*

TROTTER : What a lovely smell of bacon !

MASON : Yes, sir. I reckon there's enough smell of bacon in 'ere to last for dinner.

TROTTER : Well, there's nothing like a good fat bacon rasher when you're as empty as I am.

MASON : I'm glad you like it fat, sir.

TROTTER : Well, I like a bit o' lean, too.

MASON : There *was* a bit of lean in the middle of yours, sir, but it's kind of shrunk up in the cooking.

TROTTER : Bad cooking, that's all. Any porridge ?

MASON : Oh, yes, sir. There's porridge.

TROTTER : Lumpy, I s'pose ?

MASON : Yes, sir. Quite nice and lumpy.

TROTTER : Well, take the lumps out o' mine.

MASON : And just bring you the gravy, sir ? Very good, sir.

[MASON *goes out.* TROTTER *looks after him suspiciously.*

TROTTER : You know, that man's getting familiar.

OSBORNE : He's not a bad cook.

[TROTTER *has picked up his coffee mug, and is smelling it.*

TROTTER : I say, d'you realise he's washed his dish-cloth ?

OSBORNE : I know. I told him about it.

TROTTER : Did you really ? You've got some pluck. 'Ow did you go about it ?

OSBORNE : I wrote and asked my wife for a packet of Lux. Then I gave it to Mason and suggested he tried it on something.

TROTTER : Good man. No, he's not a bad cook. Might be a lot worse. When I was in the ranks we 'ad a prize cook—used to be a plumber before the war. Ought to 'ave seen the stew 'e made. Thin ! Thin wasn't the word. Put a bucketful of 'is stew in a bath and pull the plug, and the whole lot would go down in a couple of gurgles.

[MASON *brings* TROTTER'S *porridge.*

MASON : I've took the lumps out.

TROTTER : Good. Keep 'em and use 'em for dumplings next time we 'ave boiled beef.

MASON : Very good, sir.

[*He goes out.*

TROTTER : Yes. That plumber was a prize cook, 'e was. Lucky for us one day 'e set 'imself on fire making the tea. 'E went 'ome pretty well fried. Did Mason get that pepper ?

OSBORNE : Yes.

TROTTER : Good. Must 'ave pepper.

OSBORNE : I thought you were on duty now.

TROTTER : I'm supposed to be. Stanhope sent me down to get my breakfast. He's looking after things till I finish.

OSBORNE : He's got a long job then.

TROTTER : Oh, no. I'm a quick eater. Hi ! Mason ! Bacon !

MASON (*outside*) : Coming, sir !

OSBORNE : It's a wonderful morning.

TROTTER : Isn't it lovely ? Makes you feel sort of young and 'opeful. I was up in that old trench under the brick wall just now, and damned if a bloomin' little bird didn't start singing ! Didn't 'arf sound funny. Sign of spring, I s'pose.

[MASON *arrives with* TROTTER'S *bacon.*

That looks all right.

MASON : If you look down straight on it from above, sir, you can see the bit o' lean quite clear.

TROTTER : Good Lord, yes ! That's it, isn't it ?

MASON : No, sir ; that's a bit o' rust off the pan.

TROTTER : Ah ! *That's* it, then !

MASON : You've got it, sir.

[*He goes out.*

TROTTER : Cut us a chunk of bread, Uncle.

[OSBORNE *cuts him off a chunk.*

OSBORNE : How are things going up there ?

TROTTER : I don't like the look of things a bit.

OSBORNE : You mean—the quiet ?

TROTTER : Yes. Standing up there in the dark last night there didn't seem a thing in the world alive—except the rats squeaking and my stomach grumbling about that cutlet.

OSBORNE : It's quiet even now.

TROTTER : Too damn quiet. You can bet your boots the Boche is up to something. The big attack soon, I reckon. I don't like it, Uncle. Pass the jam.

OSBORNE : It's strawberry.

TROTTER : Is it ? I'm glad we've got rid o' that raspberry jam. Can't stand raspberry jam. Pips get be'ind your plate.

OSBORNE : Did Stanhope tell you he wants two wiring parties out to-night ?

TROTTER : Yes. He's fixing it up now. (*He pauses, and goes on in a low voice*) My goodness, Uncle, doesn't he look ill !

OSBORNE : I'm afraid he's not well.

TROTTER : Nobody'd be well who went on like he does. (*There is another pause.*) You know when you came up to relieve me last night ?

OSBORNE : Yes ?

TROTTER : Well, Raleigh and me came back here, and there was Stanhope sitting on that bed drinking a whiskey. He looked as white as a sheet. God, he looked awful ; he'd drunk the bottle since dinner. I said, " 'Ullo ! " and he didn't seem to know who I was. Uncanny, wasn't it, Raleigh ?

RALEIGH (*with lowered head*) : Yes.

TROTTER : He just said, " Better go to bed, Raleigh "—just as if Raleigh'd been a school kid.

OSBORNE : Did he ? (*There is a pause.*) Look at the sun. It'll be quite warm soon.

[*They look at the pale square of sunlight on the floor.*

TROTTER : It's warm now. You can feel it on your face outside if you stand in it. First time this year. 'Ope we 'ave an 'ot summer.

OSBORNE : So do I.

TROTTER : Funny about that bird. Made me feel quite braced up. Sort of made me think about my garden of an evening—walking round in me slippers after supper, smoking me pipe.

OSBORNE : You keen on gardening ?

TROTTER : Oh, I used to do a bit of an evening. I 'ad a decent little grass plot in front, with

flower-borders—geraniums, lobelia, and calceolaria—you know, red, white, and blue. Looked rather nice in the summer.

OSBORNE : Yes.

TROTTER : 'Ad some fine 'olly'ocks out the back. One year I 'ad one eight feet 'igh. Took a photer of it. (*He fumbles in his pocket case.*) Like to look at it ?

OSBORNE : I would. (*He looks at the photo.*) By Jove, it's a beauty.

TROTTER (*looking over* OSBORNE'S *shoulder*) : You see that, just there ?

OSBORNE : Yes ?

TROTTER : That's the roof of the summer-'ouse.

OSBORNE : Is it really !

TROTTER : Just shows the 'ite of the 'olly'ock.

OSBORNE : It does. (*He shows the photo to* RALEIGH.) A beauty, isn't it ?

RALEIGH : Rather !

TROTTER : It never wanted no stick to keep it straight, neether. (*There is a pause.*) You keen on gardening ?

OSBORNE : Yes. A bit. I made a rockery when I was home on leave. I used to cycle out to the woods and get primroses and things like that, and try and get 'em to grow in my garden.

TROTTER : I don't suppose they would !

OSBORNE : They would if you pressed a bit of moss round them——

TROTTER : —to make 'em feel at 'ome, eh ? (*He laughs.*)

OSBORNE : They'll be coming out again soon if they've got this sun at home.

TROTTER : I reckon they will. I remember one morning last spring—we was coming out of the

salient. Just when it was getting light in the morning—it was at the time when the Boche was sending over a lot of that gas that smells like pear-drops, you know?

OSBORNE : I know. Phosgene.

TROTTER : That's it. We were scared to hell of it. All of a sudden we smelt that funny sweet smell, and a fellow shouted " Gas ! "—and we put on our masks ; and then I spotted what it was.

OSBORNE : What was it ?

TROTTER : Why, a blinkin' may-tree ! All out in bloom, growing beside the path ! We did feel a lot of silly poops—putting on gas masks because of a damn may-tree ! (*He stretches himself and tries to button his tunic.*) Lord ! I *must* get my fat down. (*He gets up.*) Well, I better go and relieve Stanhope. He'll curse like hell if I don't. I bet he's got a red-hot liver this morning.

OSBORNE : I relieve you at eleven.

TROTTER : That's right. I don't like this time of day in the line. The old Boche 'as just 'ad 'is breakfast, and sends over a few whizz-bangs and rifle grenades to show 'e ain't forgotten us. Still, I'd rather 'ave a bang or two than this damn quiet. (*He puts on his helmet and gas mask satchel and goes up the steps.*) Cheero !

OSBORNE : Cheero !

RALEIGH : Cheero !

OSBORNE (*to* RALEIGH) : I expect Stanhope'll let you go on duty alone now.

RALEIGH : Will he ? About what time ?

OSBORNE : Well, after me, I expect. From about two till four.

RALEIGH : I see.

[*There is a pause. Then* OSBORNE *looks at* RALEIGH *and laughs.*

OSBORNE : What do you think about it all ?

RALEIGH : Oh, all right, thanks. (*He laughs.*) I feel I've been here ages.

OSBORNE (*filling his pipe*) : I expect you do. The time passes, though.

RALEIGH : Are we here for six days ?

OSBORNE : Yes. Seems a long time, doesn't it ?

RALEIGH (*laughing shortly*) : It does rather. I can't imagine—the end of six days here——

OSBORNE : Anyhow, we've done twelve hours already. It's fine when you are relieved and go down the line to billets, and have a good hot bath, and sit and read under trees.

RALEIGH : Good Lord, I feel I haven't seen a tree for ages—not a real tree, with leaves and branches—and yet I've only been here twelve hours.

OSBORNE : How did you feel—in the front line ?

RALEIGH : Oh, all right. It seemed so frightfully quiet and uncanny—everybody creeping about and talking in low voices. I suppose you've *got* to talk quietly when you're so near the German front line—only about seventy yards, isn't it ?

OSBORNE : Yes. About the breadth of a Rugger field.

RALEIGH : It's funny to think of it like that.

OSBORNE : I always measure distances like that out here. Keeps them in proportion.

RALEIGH : Did you play Rugger ?

OSBORNE : Yes. But mostly reffing at school in the last few years.

RALEIGH : Are you a schoolmaster, then ?

OSBORNE : Yes. I must apologise.

RALEIGH : Oh, I don't mind schoolmasters. (*Hastily*) I—I—mean, I never met one outside a school.

OSBORNE : They do get out sometimes.

RALEIGH (*laughing*) : Who did you play for ?

OSBORNE : The Harlequins.

RALEIGH : I say, really !

OSBORNE : I played for the English team on one great occasion.

RALEIGH : What ! For *England* !

OSBORNE : I was awfully lucky to get the chance. It's a long time ago now.

RALEIGH (*with awe*) : Oh, but, good Lord ! that must have been simply topping. Where did you play ?

OSBORNE : Wing three.

RALEIGH : I say, I—I never realised—you'd played for England ?

OSBORNE : Tuppence to talk to me now ! Anyhow, don't breeze it about.

RALEIGH : Don't the others know ?

OSBORNE : We never talk about Rugger.

RALEIGH : They ought to know. It'd make them feel jolly bucked.

OSBORNE (*laughing*) : It doesn't make much difference out here !

RALEIGH : It must be awfully thrilling, playing in front of a huge crowd—all shouting and cheering——

OSBORNE : You don't notice it when the game begins.

RALEIGH : You're too taken up with the game ?

OSBORNE : Yes.

RALEIGH : I used to get wind up playing at school with only a few kids looking on.

OSBORNE : You feel it more when there are only a few. (*He has picked up a slip of paper from the table ; suddenly he laughs.*) Look at this !

RALEIGH (*looking at it curiously*) : What is it ?

OSBORNE : Trotter's plan to make the time pass quickly. One hundred and forty-four little circles—one for each hour of six days. He's blacked in six already. He's six hours behind.

RALEIGH : It's rather a good idea. I like Trotter.

OSBORNE : He's a good chap.

RALEIGH : He makes things feel—natural.

OSBORNE : He's a genuine sort of chap.

RALEIGH : That's it. He's genuine. (*There is a pause. He has been filling a new pipe.*)

[OSBORNE *is puffing at his old one.*

How topping—to have played for England !

OSBORNE : It *was* rather fun.

RALEIGH (*after a pause*) : The Germans are really quite decent, aren't they ? I mean, outside the newspapers ?

OSBORNE : Yes. (*Pause.*) I remember up at Wipers we had a man shot when he was out on patrol. Just at dawn. We couldn't get him in that night. He lay out there groaning all day. Next night three of our men crawled out to get him in. It was so near the German trenches that they could have shot our fellows one by one. But, when our men began dragging the wounded man back over the rough ground, a big German officer stood up in their trenches and called out : "Carry him !"—and our fellows stood up and carried the man back, and the German officer fired some lights for them to see by.

RALEIGH : How topping !

OSBORNE : Next day we blew each other's trenches to blazes.

RALEIGH : It all seems rather—*silly*, doesn't it ?

OSBORNE : It does, rather.

[*There is silence for a while.*

RALEIGH : I started a letter when I came off duty last night. How do we send letters ?

OSBORNE : The quartermaster-sergeant takes them down after he brings rations up in the evenings.

[STANHOPE *is coming slowly down the steps.* RALEIGH *rises.*

RALEIGH : I think I'll go and finish it now—if I go on duty soon.

OSBORNE : Come and write it in here. It's more cheery.

RALEIGH : It's all right, thanks ; I'm quite comfortable in there. I've rigged up a sort of little table beside my bed.

OSBORNE : Righto.

[RALEIGH *goes into his dug-out.* STANHOPE *is slowly taking off his equipment.*

STANHOPE : What a foul smell of bacon.

OSBORNE : Yes. We've got bacon for breakfast.

STANHOPE : So I gather. Have you told Raleigh about rifle inspection ?

OSBORNE : No.

STANHOPE (*at the entrance to* RALEIGH'S *dug-out*) : Raleigh !

RALEIGH (*appearing*) : Yes ?

STANHOPE : You inspect your platoon's rifles at nine o'clock.

RALEIGH : Oh, righto, Stanhope. (*He goes again.*)

STANHOPE (*sitting at the table*) : I've arranged two wiring parties to begin at eight o'clock to-night —Corporal Burt with two men and Sergeant Smith with two. I want them to strengthen the wire all along the front.

OSBORNE : It's very weak at present.

STANHOPE : Every company leaves it for the next one to do. There're great holes blown out weeks ago.

OSBORNE : I know.

STANHOPE : Next night we'll start putting a belt of wire down both sides of us.

OSBORNE : Down the sides ?

STANHOPE : Yes. We'll wire ourselves right in. If this attack comes, I'm not going to trust the companies on our sides to hold their ground.

[MASON *has come in, and stands diffidently in the background.*

MASON : Would you like a nice bit o' bacon, sir ?

STANHOPE : No, thanks. I'll have a cup of tea.

MASON : Right, sir.

[*He goes out.*

STANHOPE : I've been having a good look round. We've got a strong position here—if we wire ourselves right in. The colonel's been talking to me up there.

OSBORNE : Oh. Has he been round ?

STANHOPE : Yes. He says a German prisoner gave the day of attack as the 21st.

OSBORNE : That's Thursday ?

STANHOPE : Yes. To-day's Tuesday.

OSBORNE : That means about dawn the day after to-morrow.

STANHOPE : The second dawn from now.

[*There is a pause.*

OSBORNE : Then it'll come while we're here.

STANHOPE : Yes. It'll come while we're here. And we shall be in the front row of the stalls.

OSBORNE : Oh, well——

[*In the silence that follows,* MASON *enters with a cup of tea.*

MASON : Would you like a nice plate of sardines, sir ?

STANHOPE : I should loathe it.

MASON : Very good, sir.

[*He goes out.*

OSBORNE : Did the colonel have much to say ?

STANHOPE : Only that when the attack comes we can't expect any help from behind. We're not to move from here. We've got to stick it.

OSBORNE : I see.

STANHOPE : We'll wire ourselves in as strongly as possible. I've got to arrange battle positions for each platoon and section this afternoon.

OSBORNE : Well, I'm glad it's coming at last. I'm sick of waiting.

STANHOPE (*looking at* TROTTER'S *chart*) : What's this extraordinary affair ?

OSBORNE : Trotter's plan to make the time pass by. A hundred and forty-four circles—one for each hour of six days.

STANHOPE : How many hours are there till dawn on the 21st ?

OSBORNE : Goodness knows. Not many, I hope.

STANHOPE : Nearly nine o'clock now. Twenty-four till nine to-morrow ; twelve till nine at night—that's thirty-six ; nine till six next morning ; that's forty-five altogether. (*He begins to count off forty-five circles on* TROTTER'S *chart.*)

OSBORNE : What are you going to do ?

STANHOPE : At the end of the forty-fifth circle I'm going to draw a picture of Trotter being blown up in four pieces.

OSBORNE : Don't spoil his chart. It took him an hour to make that.

STANHOPE : He won't see the point. He's no imagination.

OSBORNE : I don't suppose he has.

STANHOPE : Funny not to have any imagination. Must be rather nice.

OSBORNE : A bit dull, I should think.

STANHOPE : It must be, rather. I suppose all his life Trotter feels like you and I do when we're drowsily drunk.

OSBORNE : Poor chap !

STANHOPE : I suppose if Trotter looks at that wall he just sees a brown surface. He doesn't see into the earth beyond—the worms wandering about round the stones and roots of trees. I wonder how a worm knows when it's going up or down.

OSBORNE : When it's going down I suppose the blood runs into its head and makes it throb.

STANHOPE : Worms haven't got any blood.

OSBORNE : Then I don't suppose it ever does know.

STANHOPE : Rotten if it didn't—and went on going down when it thought it was coming up.

OSBORNE : Yes. I expect that's the one thing worms dread.

STANHOPE : D'you think this life sharpens the imagination ?

OSBORNE : It must.

STANHOPE : Whenever I look at anything nowadays I see right through it. Looking at you now there's your uniform—your jersey—shirt—vest—then beyond that——

OSBORNE : Let's talk about something else—croquet, or the war.

STANHOPE (*laughing*) : Sorry ! It's a habit that's grown on me lately—to look right through things, and on and on—till I get frightened and stop.

OSBORNE : I suppose everybody out here—*feels* more keenly.

STANHOPE : I hope so. I wondered if there was anything wrong with me. D'you ever get a sudden feeling that everything's going farther and farther away—till you're the only thing in the world—and then the world begins going away—until you're the only thing in—in the universe—and you struggle to get back—and can't ?

OSBORNE : Bit of nerve strain, that's all.

STANHOPE : You don't think I'm going potty ?

OSBORNE : Oh, Lord, no !

STANHOPE (*throwing back his head and laughing*) : Dear old Uncle ! you don't really know, do you ? You just pretend you do, to make me feel all right.

OSBORNE : When people are going potty they never talk about it ; they keep it to themselves.

STANHOPE : Oh, well, that's all right, then. (*There is silence for a while.*) I had that feeling this morning, standing out there in the line while the sun was rising. By the way, did you see the sunrise ? Wasn't it gorgeous ?

OSBORNE : Splendid—this morning.

STANHOPE : I was looking across at the Boche trenches and right beyond—not a sound or a soul ; just an enormous plain, all churned up like a sea that's got muddier and muddier till it's so stiff that it can't move. You could have heard a pin drop in the quiet ; yet you knew thousands of guns were hidden there, all ready cleaned and oiled—millions of bullets lying in pouches—thousands of Germans, waiting and thinking. Then, gradually, that feeling came——

OSBORNE : I never knew the sun could rise in so many ways till I came out here. Green, and pink, and red, and blue, and grey. Extraordinary, isn't it ?

STANHOPE : Yes. Hi ! Mason !

MASON (*outside*) : Yessir !

STANHOPE : Bring some mugs and a bottle of whiskey.

MASON : Yessir.

OSBORNE (*smiling*) : So early in the morning ?

STANHOPE : Just a spot. It's damn cold in here.

OSBORNE (*turning over the pages of a magazine*) : This show at the Hippodrome has been running a long time.

STANHOPE : What ? *Zig-zag ?*

OSBORNE : Yes. George Robey's in it.

STANHOPE : Harper saw it on leave. Says it's damn good. Robey's pricelessly funny.

[MASON *brings whiskey and mugs and water.*

OSBORNE : Wish I'd seen a show on leave.

STANHOPE : D'you mean to say you didn't go to any shows ?

OSBORNE (*laughing*) : No. I spent all the time in the garden, making a rockery. In the evenings I used to sit and smoke and read—and my wife used to knit socks and play the piano a bit. We pretended there wasn't any war at all—till my two youngsters made me help in a tin-soldier battle on the floor.

STANHOPE : Poor old Uncle ! You can't get away from it, can you ?

OSBORNE : I wish I knew how to fight a battle like those boys of mine. You ought to have seen the way they lured my men under the sofa and mowed them down.

STANHOPE (*laughing and helping himself to a drink*) : You going to have one ?

OSBORNE : Not now, thanks.

STANHOPE : You go on duty at eleven, don't you ?

OSBORNE : Yes. I relieve Trotter.

STANHOPE : Raleigh better go on at one o'clock and stay with you for an hour. Then he can stay on alone till four. Hibbert relieves him at four.

OSBORNE : Righto.

STANHOPE: What's Raleigh doing now ?

OSBORNE : Finishing a letter.

STANHOPE : Did you tell him ?

OSBORNE : About what ?

STANHOPE : Censorship.

OSBORNE : You don't mean that seriously ?

STANHOPE : Mean it ? Of course I mean it.

OSBORNE : You can't do that.

STANHOPE : Officially I'm supposed to read all your letters. Damn it all, Uncle ! Imagine yourself in my place—a letter going away from here—from that boy——

OSBORNE : He'll say nothing—rotten—about you.

STANHOPE : You think so ? (*There is a pause.*) I heard you go on duty last night. After you'd gone, I got up. I was feeling bad. I forgot Raleigh was out there with Trotter. I'd forgotten all about him. I was sleepy. I just knew something beastly had happened. Then he came in with Trotter—and looked at me. After coming in out of the night air, this place must have reeked of candle-grease, and rats—and whiskey. One thing a boy like that can't stand is a smell that isn't fresh. He looked at me as if I'd hit him between the eyes—as if I'd spat on him——

OSBORNE : You imagine things.

STANHOPE (*laughing*) : Imagine things ! No need to imagine !

OSBORNE : Why can't you treat him like any other youngster ?

[RALEIGH *comes in from his dug-out with a letter in his hand. He stops short as he notices the abrupt silence that follows his entry.*

RALEIGH : I'm sorry.

OSBORNE : It's all right, Raleigh. Going to inspect rifles ?

RALEIGH : Yes.

OSBORNE : You needn't bother if the wood's a bit dirty—just the barrels and magazines and all the metal parts.

RALEIGH : Righto.

OSBORNE : See there's plenty of oil on it. And look at the ammunition in the men's pouches.

RALEIGH : Right. (*He crosses towards the door and turns.*) Where do we put the letters to be collected ?

OSBORNE : Oh, just on the table.

RALEIGH : Thanks. (*He begins to lick the flap of the envelope.*)

STANHOPE (*in a quiet voice*) : You leave it open.

RALEIGH (*surprised*) : Open ?

STANHOPE : Yes. I have to censor all letters.

RALEIGH (*stammering*) : Oh, but—I haven't said anything about—where we are——

STANHOPE : It's the rule that letters must be read.

RALEIGH (*nervously*) : Oh, I—I didn't realise that. (*He stands embarrassed ; then gives a short laugh.*) I—I think—I'll just leave it, then. (*He unbuttons his tunic pocket to put the letter away.*)

[STANHOPE, *rises, slowly crosses and faces* RALEIGH.

STANHOPE : Give me that letter !

RALEIGH (*astonished*) : But—Dennis——

STANHOPE (*trembling*) : Give me that letter !

RALEIGH : But it's—it's private. I didn't know——

STANHOPE : D'you understand an order ? Give me that letter !

RALEIGH : But I tell you—there's nothing——

[STANHOPE *clutches* RALEIGH'S *wrist and tears the letter from his hand.*

Dennis—I'm——

STANHOPE : Don't "Dennis" me ! Stanhope's my name ! You're not at school ! Go and inspect your rifles !

[RALEIGH *stands in amazement at the foot of the steps.*

(*Shouting*) D'you understand an order ?

[*For a moment* RALEIGH *stares wide-eyed at* STANHOPE, *who is trembling and breathing heavily, then almost in a whisper he says : "Right," and goes quietly up the narrow steps.*

STANHOPE *turns towards the table.*

OSBORNE : Good heavens, Stanhope !

STANHOPE (*wheeling furiously on* OSBORNE) : Look here, Osborne, *I'm* commanding this company. I ask for advice when I want it !

OSBORNE : Very well.

[STANHOPE *sinks down at the table with the letter in his hand. There is silence for a moment. Then he throws the letter on the table and rests his head between his hands.*

STANHOPE : Oh, God ! I don't want to read the blasted thing !

OSBORNE : You'll let it go, then ?

STANHOPE : I don't care. (*There is a pause.*)

OSBORNE : Shall I glance through it—for you ?

STANHOPE : If you like.

OSBORNE : I don't *want* to.

STANHOPE : You better. I can't.

[OSBORNE *takes the letter from the table and opens it.* STANHOPE *sits with his head in his hand, digging a magazine with a pencil. After a while,* OSBORNE *glances up at* STANHOPE.

OSBORNE : D'you want to hear ?

STANHOPE : I suppose I better know.

OSBORNE : He begins with a description of his getting here—he doesn't mention the names of any places.

STANHOPE : What does he say then ?

OSBORNE : The last piece is about you.

STANHOPE : Go on.

OSBORNE (*reading*) : He says : " And now I come to the great news. I reported at Battalion Headquarters, and the colonel looked in a little book, and said, ' You report to " C " Company—Captain Stanhope.' Can't you imagine what I felt ? I was taken along some trenches and shown a dug-out. There was an awfully nice officer there—quite old—with grey hair "—(OSBORNE *clears his throat*)—" and then later Dennis came in. He looked tired, but that's because he works so frightfully hard, and because of the responsibility. Then I went on duty in the front line, and a sergeant told me all about Dennis. He said that Dennis is the finest officer in the battalion, and the men simply love him. He hardly ever sleeps in the dug-out ; he's always up in the front line with the men, cheering them on with jokes, and making them keen about things, like he did the kids at school. I'm awfully proud to think he's my friend."

[*There is silence.* STANHOPE *has not moved while* OSBORNE *has read.*

That's all. (*Pause.*) Shall I stick it down ?

[STANHOPE *sits with lowered head. He murmurs something that sounds like* "Yes, please." *He rises heavily and crosses to the shadows by* OSBORNE'S *bed.*

The sun is shining quite brightly in the trench outside.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

Afternoon on the same day. The sunlight has gone from the dug-out floor, but still shines brightly in the trench.

STANHOPE *is lying on his bed reading by the light of a candle on the table beside him. A burly* FIGURE *comes groping down the steps and stands blinking in the shadows of the dug-out. A huge man, with a heavy black moustache, a fat red face, and massive chin.*

STANHOPE *puts the magazine down, rises, and sits up to the table.*

STANHOPE : I want to talk with you, sergeant-major.

S.-M. (*standing stolidly by the steps*) : Yes, sir ?

STANHOPE : Sit down. Have a whiskey ?

S.-M. (*a suspicion of brightness in his voice*) : Thank you, sir.

[*The* SERGEANT-MAJOR *diffidently takes a small tot.*

STANHOPE : I say. You won't taste that. Take a proper one.

S.-M. : Well—sir——

[STANHOPE *reaches over, helps the* SERGEANT-MAJOR *to a large tot, and takes one himself.*

Turning chilly again, sir. Quite warm this morning.

STANHOPE : Yes

S.-M. : Well, here's your very good health, sir. (*He raises his glass and drinks.*)

STANHOPE : Cheero. (*He puts down his glass and abruptly changes his tone.*) Now, look here, sergeant-major. We must expect this attack on Thursday morning, at dawn. That's the second dawn from now.

[*The* SERGEANT-MAJOR *takes a very dirty little note-book from his pocket and jots down notes with a very small stub of pencil.*

S.-M. : Thursday morning. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE : We're to hold these trenches, and no man's to move from here.

S.-M. : Very good, sir.

STANHOPE : It may happen that companies on our sides will give way, leaving our flanks exposed ; so I want a screen of wire put down both flanks till it meets the wire in the support line.

S.-M. (*writing hurriedly*) : Both flanks—yes, sir.

STANHOPE : When the attack begins, I shall take charge of the left, and Mr. Osborne the right. You will be with Mr. Osborne, and Sergeant Baker with me ; 9 and 10 Platoons will move over here (*he points out the position on the trench map*) ; 11 and 12 Platoons to the left.

S.-M. : I see, sir.

STANHOPE : Is there anything you're not clear about ?

S.-M. (*looking at his notes*) : Seems all clear, sir.

STANHOPE : Anything you want to know ?

S.-M. : Well, sir (*clears his throat*)—when the attack comes, of course, we beat 'em off—but what if they keep on attacking ?

STANHOPE : Then we keep on beating them off.

S.-M. : Yes, sir. But what I mean is—they're bound to make a big thing of it.

STANHOPE (*cheerily*) : Oh, I think they will !

S.-M. : Well, then, sir. If they don't get through the first day, they'll attack the next day and the next——

STANHOPE : They're bound to.

S.-M. : Then oughtn't we to fix up something about, well (*he gropes for the right words*)—er—falling back ?

STANHOPE : There's no need to—you see, this company's a lot better than " A " and " B " Companies on either side of us.

S.-M. : Quite, sir.

STANHOPE : Well, then, if anyone breaks, " A " and " B " will break before we do. As long as we stick here when the other companies have given way, we can fire into the Boche as they try and get through the gaps on our sides—we'll make a hell of a mess of them. We might delay the advance a whole day.

S.-M. (*diffidently*) : Yes, sir, but what 'appens when the Boche 'as all got round the back of us ?

STANHOPE : Then we advance and win the war.

S.-M. (*pretending to make a note*) : Win the war. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE : But you understand exactly what I mean, sergeant-major. Our orders are to stick here. If you're told to stick where you are you don't make plans to retire.

S.-M. : Quite, sir.

[OSBORNE'S *voice is calling down the steps.* SERGEANT-MAJOR *rises.*

OSBORNE : Are you there, Stanhope ?

STANHOPE (*rising quickly*) : Yes. What's the matter ?

OSBORNE : The colonel's up here. Wants to see you——

STANHOPE : Oh, right, I'll come up.

COLONEL (*from above*) : All right, Stanhope—I'll come down.

S.-M. (*who has risen*) : Anything more, sir ?

STANHOPE : I don't think so. I'll see you at stand-to this evening.

S.-M. : Very good, sir.

[*He stands back a pace and salutes* STANHOPE *smartly.* STANHOPE'S *eye falls on the* SERGEANT-MAJOR'S *nearly finished drink on the table. He points to it.*

STANHOPE : Hoy ! What about that ?

S.-M. : Thank you, sir. (*He finishes the drink.*)

[*The* COLONEL *comes down the steps.*

COLONEL : Good morning, sergeant-major.

S.-M. : Good morning, sir.

[*The* SERGEANT-MAJOR *goes up the steps.*

STANHOPE : Hullo, sir !

COLONEL : Hullo, Stanhope ! (*He sniffs.*) Strong smell of bacon.

STANHOPE : Yes, sir. We had some bacon for breakfast.

COLONEL : Hangs about, doesn't it ?

STANHOPE : Yes, sir. Clings to the walls.

COLONEL : Lovely day.

STANHOPE : Splendid, sir.

COLONEL : Spring's coming. (*There is a pause.*) I'm glad you're alone. I've got some rather serious news.

STANHOPE : I'm sorry to hear that, sir. Will you have a drink ?

COLONEL : Well, thanks—just a spot.

[STANHOPE *mixes a drink for the* COLONEL *and himself.*

Here's luck.

STANHOPE : Cheero, sir. (*Bringing forward a box.*) Sit down, sir.

COLONEL : Thanks.

STANHOPE : What's the news, sir ?

COLONEL : The brigadier came to see me this morning. (*He pauses.*) It seems almost certain the attack's to come on Thursday morning. They've got information from more than one source—but they don't know where it's going to fall the hardest. The Boche began relieving his front-line troops yesterday. They're bound to put in certain regiments where they intend to make the hardest push——

STANHOPE : Naturally——

COLONEL : And the general wants us to make a raid to find out who's come into the line opposite here.

[*There is a pause.*

STANHOPE : I see. When ?

COLONEL : As soon as possible. He said to-night.

STANHOPE : Oh, but that's absurd !

COLONEL : I told him so. I said the earliest would be to-morrow afternoon. A surprise daylight raid under a smoke screen from the trench-mortar people. I think daylight best. There's not much moon now, and it's vitally important to get hold of a Boche or two.

STANHOPE : Quite.

COLONEL : I suggest sending two officers and ten men. Quite enough for the purpose. Just opposite here there's only seventy yards of No Man's Land. To-night the trench-mortars can blow a hole in the Boche wire and you can cut a hole in yours. Harrison of the trench-mortars is coming in to dinner with me this evening to discuss everything. I'd like you to come too. Eight o'clock suit you ?

STANHOPE : Very good, sir.

COLONEL : I'll leave you to select the men.

STANHOPE : You want me to go with them, sir ?

COLONEL : Oh, no, Stanhope. I—I can't let you go. No. I want one officer to direct the raid and one to make the dash in and collar some Boche.

STANHOPE : Who do you suggest, sir ?

COLONEL : Well, I suggest Osborne, for one. He's a very level-headed chap. He can direct it.

STANHOPE : And who else ?

COLONEL : Well, there's Trotter—but he's a bit fat, isn't he ? Not much good at dashing in ?

STANHOPE : No. D'you suggest Hibbert ?

COLONEL : Well, what do *you* think of Hibbert ?

STANHOPE : I don't think so.

COLONEL : No.

[*There is a pause.*

STANHOPE : Why not send a good sergeant, sir ?

COLONEL : No. I don't think a sergeant. The men expect officers to lead a raid.

STANHOPE : Yes. There is that.

COLONEL : As a matter of fact, Stanhope, I'm thinking of that youngster I sent up to you last night.

STANHOPE : Raleigh ?

COLONEL : Yes. Just the type. Plenty of guts——

STANHOPE : He's awfully new to it all——

COLONEL : All to the good. His nerves are sound.

STANHOPE : It's rotten to send a fellow who's only just arrived.

COLONEL : Well, who else is there ? I could send an officer from another company——

STANHOPE (*quickly*) : Oh, Lord, no. We'll do it.

COLONEL : Then I suggest Osborne to direct the raid and Raleigh to make the dash—with ten

good men. We'll meet Harrison at supper and arrange the smoke bombs—and blowing a hole in the wire. You select the men and talk to Osborne and Raleigh about it in the meantime.

STANHOPE : Very well, sir.

COLONEL : Better send Osborne and Raleigh down to me in the morning to talk things over. Or, better still !—I'll come up here first thing to-morrow morning.

STANHOPE : Right, sir.

COLONEL : It's all a damn nuisance ; but, after all—it's necessary.

STANHOPE : I suppose it is.

COLONEL : Well, so long, Stanhope. I'll see you at eight o'clock. Do you like fish ?

STANHOPE : Fish, sir ?

COLONEL : Yes. We've had some fresh fish sent up from railhead for supper to-night.

STANHOPE : Splendid, sir !

COLONEL : Whiting, I think it is.

STANHOPE : Good !

COLONEL : Well, bye-bye.

[*The* COLONEL *goes up the steps.*

STANHOPE *stands watching for a moment, then turns and walks slowly to the table.*

HIBBERT *comes quietly into the dug-out from the tunnel leading from his sleeping quarters.*

STANHOPE : Hullo ! I thought you were asleep.

HIBBERT : I just wanted a word with you, Stanhope.

STANHOPE : Fire away.

HIBBERT : This neuralgia of mine. I'm awfully sorry. I'm afraid I can't stick it any longer——

STANHOPE : I know. It's rotten, isn't it ? I've got it like hell——

HIBBERT (*taken aback*) : *You* have ?

STANHOPE : Had it for weeks.

HIBBERT : Well, I'm sorry, Stanhope. It's no good. I've tried damned hard ; but I must go down——

STANHOPE : Go down—where ?

HIBBERT : Why, go sick—go down the line. I must go into hospital and have some kind of treatment.

[*There is a silence for a moment.* STANHOPE *is looking at* HIBBERT—*till* HIBBERT *turns away and walks towards his dug-out.*

I'll go right along now, I think——

STANHOPE (*quietly*) : You're going to stay here.

HIBBERT : I'm going down to see the doctor. He'll send me to hospital when he understands——

STANHOPE : I've seen the doctor. I saw him this morning. He won't send you to hospital, Hibbert ; he'll send you back here. He promised me he would. (*There is silence.*) So you can save yourself a walk.

HIBBERT (*fiercely*) : What the hell—— !

STANHOPE : Stop that !

HIBBERT : I've a perfect right to go sick if I want to. The men can—why can't an officer ?

STANHOPE : No man's sent down unless he's very ill. There's nothing wrong with you, Hibbert. The German attack's on Thursday ; almost for certain. You're going to stay here and see it through with the rest of us.

HIBBERT (*hysterically*) : I tell you, I *can't*—the pain's nearly sending me mad. I'm going ! I've got all my stuff packed. I'm going now—*you* can't stop me !

[*He goes excitedly into the dug-out.* STANHOPE *walks slowly towards the steps, turns, and undoes the flap of his revolver holster. He takes out his revolver, and stands casually examining it.*

HIBBERT *returns with his pack slung on his back and a walking-stick in his hand. He pauses at the sight of* STANHOPE *by the steps.*

HIBBERT : Let's get by, Stanhope.

STANHOPE : You're going to stay here and do your job.

HIBBERT : Haven't I *told* you ? I *can't* ! Don't you understand ? Let—let me get by.

STANHOPE : Now look here, Hibbert. I've got a lot of work to do and no time to waste. Once and for all, you're going to stay here and see it through with the rest of us.

HIBBERT : I shall die of this pain if I don't go !

STANHOPE : Better die of the pain than be shot for deserting.

HIBBERT (*in a low voice*) : What do you mean ?

STANHOPE : You know what I mean——

HIBBERT : I've a right to see the doctor !

STANHOPE : Good God ! Don't you understand !—he'll send you back here. Dr. Preston's never let a shirker pass him yet—and he's not going to start now—two days before the attack——

HIBBERT (*pleadingly*) : Stanhope—if you only *knew* how awful I feel—— Please do let me go by——

[*He walks slowly round behind* STANHOPE. STANHOPE *turns and thrusts him roughly back. With a lightning movement* HIBBERT *raises his stick and strikes blindly at* STANHOPE, *who catches the stick, tears it from* HIBBERT'S *hands, smashes it across his knee, and throws it on the ground.*

STANHOPE : God !—you little swine. You know what that means—don't you ? Striking a superior officer !

[*There is silence.* STANHOPE *takes hold of his revolver as it swings from its lanyard.* HIBBERT *stands quivering in front of* STANHOPE.

Never mind, though. I won't have you shot for that——

HIBBERT : Let me go——

STANHOPE : If you went, I'd have you shot—for deserting. It's a hell of a disgrace—to die like that. I'd rather spare you the disgrace. I give you half a minute to think. You either stay here and try and be a man—or you try to get out of that door—to desert. If you do that, there's going to be an accident. D'you understand ? I'm fiddling with my revolver, d'you see ?—cleaning it—and it's going off by accident. It often happens out here. It's going off, and it's going to shoot you between the eyes.

HIBBERT (*in a whisper*) : You daren't——

STANHOPE : You don't deserve to be shot by accident—but I'd save you the disgrace of the other way—I give you half a minute to decide. (*He holds up his wrist to look at his watch.* Half a minute from now—

[*There is silence ; a few seconds go by. Suddenly* HIBBERT *bursts into a high-pitched laugh.*

HIBBERT : Go on, then, shoot ! You won't let me go to hospital. I swear I'll never go into those trenches again. Shoot !—and thank God——

STANHOPE (*with his eyes on his watch*) : Fifteen more seconds——

HIBBERT : Go on ! I'm ready——

STANHOPE : Ten. (*He looks up at* HIBBERT, *who has closed his eyes.*) Five.

[*Again* STANHOPE *looks up. After a moment he quietly drops his revolver into its holster and steps towards* HIBBERT, *who stands with lowered head and eyes tightly screwed up, his arms stretched stiffly by his sides, his hands tightly clutching the edges of his tunic. Gently* STANHOPE *places his hands on* HIBBERT'S *shoulders.* HIBBERT *starts violently and*

gives a little cry. He opens his eyes and stares vacantly into STANHOPE'S *face.* STANHOPE *is smiling.*

STANHOPE : Good man, Hibbert. I liked the way you stuck that.

HIBBERT (*hoarsely*) : Why didn't you shoot ?

STANHOPE : Stay here, old chap—and see it through——

[HIBBERT *stands trembling, trying to speak. Suddenly he breaks down and cries.* STANHOPE *takes his hands from his shoulders and turns away.*

HIBBERT : Stanhope ! I've tried like hell—I swear I have. Ever since I came out here I've hated and loathed it. Every sound up there makes me all—cold and sick. I'm different to—to the others—you don't understand. It's got worse and worse, and now I can't bear it any longer. I'll never go up those steps again—into the line—with the men looking at me—and knowing—I'd rather die here. (*He is sitting on* STANHOPE'S *bed, crying without effort to restrain himself.*)

STANHOPE (*pouring out a whiskey*) : Try a drop of this, old chap——

HIBBERT : No, thanks.

STANHOPE : Go on. Drink it.

[HIBBERT *takes the mug and drinks.*

STANHOPE *sits down beside* HIBBERT *and puts an arm round his shoulder.*

I know what you feel, Hibbert. I've known all along——

HIBBERT : How *can* you know ?

STANHOPE : Because I feel the same—exactly the same ! Every little noise up there makes me feel —just as you feel. Why didn't you tell me instead of talking about neuralgia ? We *all* feel like you do sometimes, if you only knew. I hate and

loathe it all. Sometimes I feel I could just lie down on this bed and pretend I was paralysed or something—and couldn't move—and just lie there till I died—or was dragged away.

HIBBERT : I can't bear to go up into those awful trenches again——

STANHOPE : When are you due to go on ?

HIBBERT : Quite soon. At four.

STANHOPE : Shall we go on together ? We know how we both feel now. Shall we see if we can stick it together ?

HIBBERT : I can't——

STANHOPE : Supposing I said *I* can't—supposing we *all* say we can't—what would happen then ?

HIBBERT : I don't care. What does it matter ? It's all so—so beastly—nothing matters——

STANHOPE : Supposing the worst happened—supposing we were knocked right out. Think of all the chaps who've gone already. It can't be very lonely there—with all those fellows. Sometimes I think it's lonelier here. (*He pauses.*)

[HIBBERT *is sitting quietly now, his eyes roving vacantly in front of him.*

Just go and have a quiet rest. Then we'll go out together.

HIBBERT : Do please let me go, Stanhope——

STANHOPE : If you went—and left Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh and all those men up there to do your work—could you ever look a man straight in the face again—in all your life ? (*There is silence again.*) You may be wounded. Then you can go home and feel proud—and if you're killed you—you won't have to stand this hell any more. I might have fired just now. If I had you would have been dead now. But you're still alive—with a straight fighting chance of coming through. Take the chance, old chap,

and stand in with Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh. Don't you think it worth standing in with men like that?—when you know they all feel like you do—in their hearts—and just go on sticking it because they know it's—it's the only thing a decent man can do. (*Again there is silence.*) What about it?

HIBBERT: I'll—I'll try——

STANHOPE: Good man!

HIBBERT: You—you won't say anything, Stanhope—about this?

STANHOPE: If you promise not to tell anyone what a blasted funk *I* am.

HIBBERT (*with a little laugh*): No.

STANHOPE: Splendid! Now go and have ten minutes' rest and a smoke—then we'll go up together and hold each other's hands—and jump every time a rat squeaks.

[HIBBERT *rises and blows his nose.*

We've all got a good fighting chance. *I* mean to come through—don't you?

HIBBERT: Yes. Rather. (*He goes timidly towards his dug-out, and turns at the doorway.*) It's awfully decent of you, Stanhope—

[STANHOPE *is pouring himself out a whiskey.*

and thanks most awfully for——

STANHOPE: That's all right.

[HIBBERT *goes away.*

STANHOPE *takes a drink and sits down at the table to write.*

MASON *comes in.*

MASON: Will you have a nice cup of tea, sir?

STANHOPE: Can you guarantee it's nice?

MASON: Well, sir—it's a bit oniony, but that's only because of the saucepan.

STANHOPE : In other words, it's onion soup with tea-leaves in it ?

MASON : Not till dinner-time, sir.

STANHOPE : All right, Mason. Bring two cups of onion tea. One for Mr. Hibbert.

MASON : Very good, sir.

[*Going towards the door, he meets* OSBORNE *coming in.*

Will you have a nice cup of tea, sir ?

OSBORNE : Please, Mason—and plenty of bread and butter and strawberry jam.

MASON : Very good, sir.

STANHOPE : Well, Uncle—how are things going on up there ?

OSBORNE : Two lonely rifle grenades came over just now.

STANHOPE : I heard them. Where did they pitch ?

OSBORNE : Just over the front line on the left. Otherwise nothing doing.

[*Pause.*

STANHOPE : The colonel's been talking to me.

OSBORNE : About the attack ?

STANHOPE : Partly. We've got to make a raid, Uncle.

OSBORNE : Oh ? When ?

STANHOPE : To-morrow afternoon. Under a smoke screen. Two officers and ten men.

OSBORNE : Who's going ?

STANHOPE : You and Raleigh.

[*Pause.*

OSBORNE : Oh. (*There is another pause.*) Why Raleigh ?

STANHOPE : The colonel picked you to direct and Raleigh to dash in.

OSBORNE : I see.

STANHOPE : The brigade wants to know who's opposite here.

OSBORNE : To-morrow ? What time ?

STANHOPE : I suggest about five o'clock. A little before dusk——

OSBORNE : I see.

STANHOPE : I'm damn sorry.

OSBORNE : That's all right, old chap.

STANHOPE : I'm dining with the colonel to arrange everything. Then I'll come back and go through it with you.

OSBORNE : Where do we raid from ?

STANHOPE : Out of the sap on our left. Straight across.

OSBORNE : Where's the map ?

STANHOPE : Here we are. Look. Straight across to this sentry post of the Boche. Sixty yards. To-night we'll lay out a guiding tape as far as possible. After dark the toch-emmas are going to break the Boche wire and we'll cut a passage in ours.

OSBORNE : Will you fix up the men who are to go ?

STANHOPE : Are you keen on any special men ?

OSBORNE : Can I take a corporal ?

STANHOPE : Sure.

OSBORNE : May I have young Crooks ?

STANHOPE : Righto.

OSBORNE : You'll ask for volunteers, I suppose ?

STANHOPE : Yes. I'll see the sergeant-major and get him to go round for names.

[*He crosses to the doorway as* MASON *comes in with the tea.*

MASON : Your tea, sir !

STANHOPE : Keep it hot, Mason.

MASON : Will you take this cup, Mr. Osborne ?

STANHOPE : Take the other in to Mr. Hibbert, in there.

MASON : Very good, sir.

[*He goes in to* HIBBERT'S *dug-out.*

STANHOPE : Shan't be long, Uncle.

[*He goes up the steps.*

OSBORNE : Righto.

[MASON *returns.*

MASON : Will you have cut bread and butter—or shall I bring the loaf, sir ?

OSBORNE : Cut it, Mason, please.

MASON : Just bringing the jam separately ?

OSBORNE : Yes.

MASON : Very good, sir.

[MASON *goes out.*

OSBORNE *takes a small leather bound book from his pocket, opens it at a marker, and begins to read.*

TROTTER *appears from the sleeping dug-out looking very sleepy.*

TROTTER : Tea ready ?

OSBORNE : Yes.

TROTTER : Why's Hibbert got his tea in there ?

OSBORNE : I don't know.

TROTTER (*rubbing his eyes*) : Oh, Lord, I do feel frowsy. 'Ad a fine sleep, though.

[MASON *brings more tea and a pot of jam.*

MASON : Bread just coming, sir. 'Ere's the strawberry jam, sir.

TROTTER (*reciting*) :

" ' Tell me, mother, what is that
That looks like strawberry jam ? '
' Hush, hush, my dear ; 'tis only Pa
Run over by a tram——' "

OSBORNE : The colonel came here while you were asleep.

TROTTER : Oh ?

OSBORNE : We've got to make a raid to-morrow afternoon.

TROTTER : Oh, Lord ! What—all of us ?

OSBORNE : Two officers and ten men.

TROTTER : Who's got to do it ?

OSBORNE : Raleigh and I.

TROTTER : Raleigh !

OSBORNE : Yes.

TROTTER : But 'e's only just come !

OSBORNE : Apparently that's the reason.

TROTTER : And you're going too ?

OSBORNE : Yes.

TROTTER : Let's 'ear all about it.

OSBORNE : I know nothing yet. Except that it's got to be done.

TROTTER : What a damn nuisance !

OSBORNE : It is, rather.

TROTTER : I reckon the Boche are all ready waiting for it. Did you 'ear about the raid just south of 'ere the other night ?

OSBORNE : Nothing much.

TROTTER : The trench-mortars go and knock an 'ole in the Boche wire to let our fellers through—and in the night the Boche went out and tied bits o' red rag on each side of the 'ole !

OSBORNE : Yes. I heard about that.

TROTTER : And even then our fellers 'ad to make the raid. It was murder. Doesn't this tea taste of onions ?

OSBORNE : It does a bit.

TROTTER : Pity Mason don't clean 'is pots better.

[MASON *brings some bread on a plate.*

This tea tastes of onions.

MASON : I'm sorry, sir. Onions do 'ave such a way of cropping up again.

TROTTER : Yes, but we 'aven't 'ad onions for days !

MASON : I know, sir. That's what makes it so funny.

TROTTER : Well, you better do something about it.

MASON : I'll look into it, sir.

[*He goes out.*

OSBORNE *and* TROTTER *prepare themselves slices of bread and jam.*

TROTTER : Joking apart. It's damn ridiculous making a raid when the Boche are expecting it.

OSBORNE : We're not doing it for fun.

TROTTER : I know.

OSBORNE : You might avoid talking to Raleigh about it.

TROTTER : Why ? How do you mean ?

OSBORNE : There's no need to tell him it's murder——

TROTTER : Oh, Lord ! no. (*He pauses.*) I'm sorry 'e's got to go. 'E's a nice young feller——

[OSBORNE *turns to his book. There is silence.*

What are you reading ?

OSBORNE (*wearily*) : Oh, just a book.

TROTTER : What's the title ?

OSBORNE (*showing him the cover*) : Ever read it ?

TROTTER (*leaning over and reading the cover*) : *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*—why, that's a kid's book !

OSBORNE : Yes.

TROTTER : You aren't *reading* it ?

OSBORNE : Yes.

TROTTER : What—a *kid's* book ?

OSBORNE : Haven't you read it ?

TROTTER (*scornfully*) : No !

OSBORNE : You ought to. (*Reads*) :

> " How doth the little crocodile
> Improve his shining tail,
> And pour the waters of the Nile
> On every golden scale ?
>
> " How cheerfully he seems to grin
> And neatly spread his claws,
> And welcomes little fishes in
> With gently smiling jaws ! "

TROTTER (*after a moment's thought*) : I don't see no point in that.

OSBORNE (*wearily*) : Exactly. That's just the point.

TROTTER (*looking curiously at* OSBORNE) : You *are* a funny chap !

[STANHOPE *returns.*

STANHOPE : The sergeant-major's getting volunteers.

OSBORNE : Good !

TROTTER : Sorry to 'ear about the raid, skipper.

STANHOPE (*shortly*) : So am I. What do you make the time ?

TROTTER : Just on four.

[MASON *brings in more tea.*

STANHOPE (*taking the mug of tea*) : Was Hibbert asleep when you came out of there ?

TROTTER : No. 'E was just lying on 'is bed, smoking.

STANHOPE (*going to the sleeping dug-out*) : Hibbert !

HIBBERT (*coming out*) : I'm ready, Stanhope.

STANHOPE : Had some tea ?

HIBBERT : Yes, thanks.

TROTTER : I reckon Raleigh'll be glad to be relieved. Rotten being on dooty for the first time alone.

OSBORNE : I don't think he minds.

STANHOPE : I shall be up there some time, Uncle.

OSBORNE : I say, why don't you have a rest—you've been on the go all day.

STANHOPE : There's too much to do. This raid's going to upset the arrangements of the wiring party to-night. Can't have men out there while the toch-emmas are blowing holes in the Boche wire. (*He drinks up his tea.*) Ready, Hibbert ? Come on, my lad.

[STANHOPE *and* HIBBERT *leave the dug-out together.* TROTTER *looks after them curiously, and turns to* OSBORNE.

TROTTER : Can't understand that little feller, can you ?

OSBORNE : Who ?

TROTTER : Why, 'Ibbert. D'you see 'is eyes ? All red. 'E told me in there 'e'd got 'ay-fever.

OSBORNE : Rotten thing, hay-fever.

TROTTER : If you ask me, 'e's been crying——

[OSBORNE *is writing at the table.*

OSBORNE : Maybe.

TROTTER : Funny little bloke, isn't 'e ?

OSBORNE : Yes. I say—d'you mind ? I just want to get a letter off.

TROTTER : Oh, sorry. They 'aven't collected the letters yet, then ?

OSBORNE : Not yet.

TROTTER : I'll get one off to my old lady. (*He goes towards his dug-out.*) She's wrote and asked if I've got fleas.

OSBORNE : Have you ?

TROTTER (*gently rotating his shoulders*) : I wish it *was* fleas.

[TROTTER *goes into his dug-out* ; OSBORNE *continues his letter.*

RALEIGH *comes down the steps from the trench.*

RALEIGH (*excitedly*) : I say, Stanhope's told me about the raid.

OSBORNE : Has he ?

RALEIGH : Just you and me, isn't it—and ten men ?

OSBORNE : Yes, to-morrow. Just before dusk. Under a smoke cloud.

RALEIGH : I say—it's most frightfully exciting !

OSBORNE : We shall know more about it after Stanhope sees the colonel to-night.

RALEIGH : Were you and I picked—specially ?

OSBORNE : Yes.

RALEIGH : I—say !

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

SCENE I

The following day, towards sunset. The earth wall of the trench outside glows with a light that slowly fades with the sinking sun.

STANHOPE *is alone, wandering to and fro across the dug-out. He looks up the steps for a moment, crosses to the table, and glances down at the map. He looks anxiously at his watch, and, going to the servant's dug-out, calls :*

STANHOPE : Mason !

MASON (*outside*) : Yessir !

STANHOPE : Are you making the coffee ?

MASON : Yessir !

STANHOPE : Make it hot and strong. Ready in five minutes. I'll call when it's wanted.

MASON : Very good, sir.

[*Again* STANHOPE *wanders restlessly to and fro. The* COLONEL *comes down the steps.*

COLONEL : Everything ready ?

STANHOPE : Yes, sir. (*There is silence.*) You've no news, then ?

COLONEL : I'm afraid not. It's got to be done.

STANHOPE (*after a pause*) : I see.

COLONEL : The brigadier says the Boche did the same thing just south of here the other day.

STANHOPE : I know ; but didn't you suggest we altered our plans and made a surprise raid farther up the line after dark ?

COLONEL : Yes. I suggested that.

STANHOPE : What did he say ?

COLONEL : He said the present arrangements have got to stand.

STANHOPE : But surely he must realise—— ?

COLONEL (*impatiently breaking in*) : Look here, Stanhope, I've done all I can, but my report's got to be at headquarters by seven this evening. If we wait till it's dark we shall be too late.

STANHOPE : Why seven ?

COLONEL : They've got some conference to arrange the placing of reserves.

STANHOPE : They can't have it later because of dinner, I suppose.

COLONEL : Lots of raids have taken place along the line to-day. With the attack to-morrow morning, headquarters naturally want all the information they can get as early as possible.

STANHOPE : Meanwhile the Boche are sitting over there with a dozen machine-guns trained on that hole—waiting for our fellows to come.

COLONEL : Well, I can't disobey orders.

STANHOPE : Why didn't the trench-mortars blow a dozen holes in different places—so the Boche wouldn't know which we were going to use ?

COLONEL : It took three hours to blow that one. How could they blow a dozen in the time ? It's no good worrying about that now. It's too late. Where's Osborne and Raleigh ?

STANHOPE : They're up in the sap, having a last look round. What d'you make the time, sir ?

COLONEL : Exactly nineteen minutes to.

STANHOPE : I'm thirty seconds behind you.

COLONEL : Funny. We checked this morning.

STANHOPE : Still, it's near enough. We shan't go till the smoke blows across.

COLONEL : The smoke ought to blow across nicely. The wind's just right. I called on the trench-mortars on the way up. Everything's ready. They'll drop the bombs thirty yards to the right.

STANHOPE : Are you going to stay here ?

COLONEL : I'll watch from the trench just above, I think. Bring the prisoners straight back here. We'll question them right away.

STANHOPE : Why not take them straight down to your headquarters ?

COLONEL : Well, the Boche are bound to shell pretty heavily. I don't want the risk of the prisoners being knocked out before we've talked to them.

STANHOPE : All right. I'll have them brought back here.

[*There is a pause. The* COLONEL *sucks hard at his pipe.* STANHOPE *roves restlessly about, smoking a cigarette.*

COLONEL : It's no good getting depressed. After all, it's only sixty yards. The Boche'll be firing into a blank fog. Osborne's a cool, level-headed chap, and Raleigh's the very man to dash in. You've picked good men to follow them ?

STANHOPE : The best. All youngsters. Strong, keen chaps.

COLONEL : Good. (*Another pause.*) You know quite well I'd give anything to cancel the beastly affair.

STANHOPE : I know you would, sir.

COLONEL : Have these red rags on the wire upset the men at all ?

STANHOPE : It's hard to tell. They naturally take it as a joke. They say the rags are just what they want to show them the way through the gap.

COLONEL : That's the spirit, Stanhope.

[OSBORNE *and* RALEIGH *come down the steps.*

Well, Osborne. Everything ready ?

OSBORNE : Yes, I think we're all ready, sir. I make it just a quarter to.

COLONEL : That's right.

OSBORNE : The men are going to stand by at three minutes to.

COLONEL : The smoke bombs drop exactly on the hour. You'll give the word to go when the smoke's thick enough ?

OSBORNE : That's right, sir.

STANHOPE (*at the servant's dug-out*) : Mason !

MASON : Coming, sir !

STANHOPE : Were the men having their rum, Uncle ?

OSBORNE : Yes. Just as we left. It gives it a quarter of an hour to soak in.

COLONEL : That's right. Are they cheerful ?

OSBORNE : Yes. Quite.

[MASON *brings in two cups of coffee and puts them on table.*

STANHOPE : Would you like to go up and speak to them, sir ?

COLONEL : Well, don't you think they'd rather be left alone ?

STANHOPE : I think they would appreciate a word or two.

COLONEL : All right. If you think they would.

OSBORNE : They're all in the centre dug-out, sir.

COLONEL : Right. You coming, Stanhope ?

STANHOPE : Yes. I'll come, sir.

[*The* COLONEL *lingers a moment. There is an awkward pause. Then the* COLONEL *clears his throat and speaks.*

COLONEL : Well, good luck, Osborne. I'm certain you'll put up a good show.

OSBORNE (*taking the* COLONEL'S *hand*) : Thank you, sir.

COLONEL : And, Raleigh, just go in like blazes. Grab hold of the first Boche you see and bundle him across here. One'll do, but bring more if you see any handy.

RALEIGH (*taking the* COLONEL'S *offered hand*) : Right, sir.

COLONEL : And, if you succeed, I'll recommend you both for the M.C.

[OSBORNE *and* RALEIGH *murmur their thanks.*

Remember, a great deal may depend on bringing in a German. It may mean the winning of the whole war. You never know. (*Another pause.*) Well, good luck to you both.

[*Again* OSBORNE *and* RALEIGH *murmur their thanks. The* COLONEL *and* STANHOPE *go towards the door.*

(*Over his shoulder.*) Don't forget to empty your pockets of papers and things.

RALEIGH : Oh, no. (*He goes into his dug-out, taking letters and papers from his pockets.*)

[STANHOPE *is about to follow the* COLONEL *up the steps when* OSBORNE *calls him back.*

OSBORNE : Er—Stanhope—just a moment.

STANHOPE (*returning*) : Hullo !

OSBORNE : I say, don't think I'm being morbid, or anything like that, but would you mind taking these ?

STANHOPE : Sure. Until you come back, old man.

OSBORNE : It's only just in case—— (*He takes a letter and his watch from his tunic pocket and puts it on the table. Then he pulls off his ring.*) If anything should happen, would you send these along to my wife ? (*He pauses, and gives an awkward little laugh.*)

STANHOPE (*putting the articles together on the table*) : You're coming back, old man. Damn it ! what on earth should I do without you ?

OSBORNE (*laughing*) : Goodness knows !

STANHOPE : Must have somebody to tuck me up in bed. (*There is a pause.*) Well, I'll see you up in the sap, before you go. Just have a spot of rum in that coffee.

OSBORNE : Righto.

[STANHOPE *goes to the steps and lingers for a moment.*

STANHOPE : Cheero !

[*For a second their eyes meet ; they laugh.* STANHOPE *goes slowly up the steps.*

There is silence in the dug-out. OSBORNE *has been filling his pipe, and stands lighting it as* RALEIGH *returns.*

OSBORNE : Just time for a small pipe.

RALEIGH : Good. I'll have a cigarette, I think. (*He feels in his pocket.*)

OSBORNE : Here you are. (*He offers his case to* RALEIGH.)

RALEIGH : I say, I'm always smoking yours.

OSBORNE : That's all right. (*Pause.*) What about this coffee ?

RALEIGH : Sure.

[*They sit at the table.*

OSBORNE : Are you going to have a drop of rum in it ?

RALEIGH : Don't you think it might make us a —a bit muzzy ?

OSBORNE : I'm just having the coffee as it is.

RALEIGH : I think I will, too.

OSBORNE : We'll have the rum afterwards—to celebrate.

RALEIGH : That's a much better idea.

[*They stir their coffee in silence.* OSBORNE'S *eyes meet* RALEIGH'S. *He smiles.*

OSBORNE : How d'you feel ?

RALEIGH : All right.

OSBORNE : I've got a sort of empty feeling inside.

RALEIGH : That's just what I've got !

OSBORNE : Wind up !

RALEIGH : I keep wanting to yawn.

OSBORNE : That's it. Wind up. I keep wanting to yawn too. It'll pass off directly we start.

RALEIGH (*taking a deep breath*) : I wish we could go now.

OSBORNE (*looking at his watch on the table*) : We've got eight minutes yet.

RALEIGH : Oh, Lord !

OSBORNE : Let's just have a last look at the map. (*He picks up the map and spreads it out.*) Directly the smoke's thick enough, I'll give the word. You run straight for this point here——

RALEIGH : When I get to the Boche wire I lie down and wait for you.

OSBORNE : Don't forget to throw your bombs.

RALEIGH (*patting his pocket*) : No. I've got them here.

OSBORNE : When I shout " Righto ! "—in you go with your eight men. I shall lie on the Boche parapet, and blow my whistle now and then to show you where I am. Pounce on the first Boche you see and bundle him out to me.

RALEIGH : Righto.

OSBORNE : Then we come back like blazes.

RALEIGH : The whole thing'll be over quite quickly ?

OSBORNE : I reckon with luck we shall be back in three minutes.

RALEIGH : As quick as that ?

OSBORNE : I think so. (*He folds up the map.*) And now let's forget all about it for—(*he looks at his watch*)—for six minutes.

RALEIGH : Oh, Lord, I can't !

OSBORNE : You must.

RALEIGH : How topping if we both get the M.C. !

OSBORNE : Yes. (*Pause.*) Your coffee sweet enough ?

RALEIGH : Yes, thanks. It's jolly good coffee. (*Pause.*) I wonder what the Boche are doing over there now ?

OSBORNE : I don't know. D'you like coffee better than tea ?

RALEIGH : I do for breakfast. (*Pause.*) Do these smoke bombs make much row when they burst ?

OSBORNE : Not much. (*Pause.*) Personally, I like cocoa for breakfast.

RALEIGH (*laughing*) : I'm sorry !

OSBORNE : Why sorry ? Why shouldn't I have cocoa for breakfast ?

RALEIGH : I don't mean that. I—mean—I'm sorry to keep talking about the raid. It's so difficult to—to talk about anything else. I was just wondering—will the Boche retaliate in any way after the raid ?

OSBORNE : Bound to—a bit.

RALEIGH : Shelling ?

OSBORNE :

"'The time has come,' the Walrus said,
'To talk of many things :
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—
Of cabbages—and kings.'"

RALEIGH :

"'And why the sea is boiling hot—
And whether pigs have wings.'"

OSBORNE : Now we're off! Quick, let's talk about pigs ! Black pigs or white pigs ?

RALEIGH : Black pigs. In the New Forest you find them, quite wild.

OSBORNE : You know the New Forest ?

RALEIGH : Rather ! My home's down there. A little place called Allum Green, just outside Lyndhurst.

OSBORNE : I know Lyndhurst well.

RALEIGH : It's rather nice down there.

OSBORNE : I like it more than any place I know.

RALEIGH : I think I do, too. Of course, it's different when you've always lived in a place.

OSBORNE : You like it in a different way.

RALEIGH : Yes. Just behind our house there's a stream called the Highland ; it runs for miles—right through the middle of the forest. Dennis and I followed it once as far as we could.

OSBORNE : I used to walk a lot round Lyndhurst.

RALEIGH : I wish we'd known each other then. You could have come with Dennis and me.

OSBORNE : I wish I had. I used to walk alone.

RALEIGH : You must come and stay with us one day.

OSBORNE : I should like to—awfully.

RALEIGH : I can show you places in the forest that nobody knows about except Dennis and me. It gets thicker and darker and cooler, and you stir up all kinds of funny wild animals.

OSBORNE : They say there are ruins, somewhere in the forest, of villages that William the Conqueror pulled down to let the forest grow.

RALEIGH : I know. We often used to look for them, but we haven't found them yet. (*Pause.*) You must come and help look one day.

OSBORNE : I'll find them all right.

RALEIGH : Then you can write to the papers. " Dramatic Discovery of Professor Osborne ! "

[OSBORNE *laughs*.

OSBORNE : I did go exploring once—digging up Roman remains.

RALEIGH : Where was that ?

OSBORNE : Near my home in Sussex there's a Roman road called Stane Street ; it runs as straight as a line from the coast to London.

RALEIGH : I know it.

OSBORNE : Near where I live the road runs over Bignor Hill, but in recent times a new road's been cut round the foot of the hill, meeting the old road again farther on. The old road over the hill hasn't been used for years and years—and it's all grown over with grass, and bushes and trees grow in the middle of it.

RALEIGH : Can you still see where it runs ?

OSBORNE : Quite easily, in places.

RALEIGH : Did you dig a bit of it up, then ?

OSBORNE : Yes. We got permission to dig out a section. It was in wonderful condition.

RALEIGH : Did you find anything ?

OSBORNE : We found a horseshoe—and a Roman penny.

RALEIGH (*laughing*) : Splendid !

OSBORNE : It's awfully fascinating, digging like that.

RALEIGH : It must be.

[OSBORNE *glances at his watch*.

Is it time yet ?

OSBORNE : Two minutes. Then we must go up. I wish we had a good hot bath waiting for us when we get back.

RALEIGH : So do I. (*Pause.*) We're having something special for dinner, aren't we ?

OSBORNE : How did you know ? It's supposed to be a secret.

RALEIGH : Mason dropped a hint.

OSBORNE : Well, we've had a fresh chicken sent up from Noyelle Farm.

RALEIGH : I say !

OSBORNE : And a most awful luxury—two bottles of champagne and half a dozen cigars ! One each, and one spare one in case one explodes.

RALEIGH : I've never smoked a cigar.

OSBORNE : It's bound to make you sick.

[RALEIGH *notices* OSBORNE'S *ring on the table ; he picks it up.*

RALEIGH : I say, here's your ring.

OSBORNE : Yes. I'm—I'm leaving it here. I don't want the risk of losing it.

RALEIGH : Oh ! (*There is silence. He puts the ring slowly down.*)

OSBORNE (*rising*) : Well, I think perhaps we ought to get ready.

RALEIGH : Yes. Righto. (*He also rises.*)

OSBORNE : I'm not going to wear a belt—just my revolver, with the lanyard round my neck.

RALEIGH : I see. (*He puts his lanyard round his neck and grips his revolver.*) I feel better with this in my hand, don't you ?

OSBORNE : Yes. Something to hold. Loaded all right ?

RALEIGH : Yes.

[*They put on their helmets.* OSBORNE *takes his pipe from his mouth and lays it carefully on the table.*

OSBORNE : I do hate leaving a pipe when it's got a nice glow on the top like that.

RALEIGH (*with a short laugh*) : What a pity !

[*There is another pause.* OSBORNE *glances at his watch as it lies on the table.*

OSBORNE : Three minutes to. I think we'd better go.

RALEIGH : Righto.

[*Their eyes meet as* OSBORNE *turns from the table.*

OSBORNE : I'm glad it's you and I—together, Raleigh.

RALEIGH (*eagerly*) : Are you—really ?

OSBORNE : Yes.

RALEIGH : So am I—awfully.

OSBORNE : We must put up a good show.

RALEIGH : Yes. Rather !

[*There is a short pause.*

OSBORNE : Let's go along, shall we ?

RALEIGH : Righto.

[*They go towards the steps.*

MASON *comes to the entrance of his dug-out as they pass.*

MASON : Good luck, sir.

OSBORNE : Thanks, Mason.

MASON : Good luck, Mr. Raleigh.

RALEIGH : Thanks.

[OSBORNE *and* RALEIGH *go up together into the pale evening sun.*

MASON *tidies the papers on the table ; picks up the two coffee mugs, and goes away.*

There is silence in the trenches above the deserted dug-out. Then, suddenly, there comes the dull "crush" of bursting smoke bombs, followed in a second by the vicious rattle of machine-guns. The red

and green glow of German alarm rockets comes faintly through the dug-out door. Then comes the thin whistle and crash of falling shells; first one by itself, then two, almost together. Quicker and quicker they come, till the noise mingles together in confused turmoil. Yet the noise is deadened by the earth walls of the tiny dug-out, and comes quite softly till the whine of one shell rises above the others to a shriek and a crash. A dark funnel of earth leaps up beyond the parapet of the trench outside; earth falls and rattles down the steps, and a black cloud of smoke rises slowly out of sight. Gradually the noise dies away—there is a longer pause between the crash of each bursting shell. The machine-guns stop—rattle again and stop—rattle for the last time—and stop.

Voices are calling in the trench outside; STANHOPE'S *voice is heard*:

STANHOPE: All right, sir. Come down quickly!

COLONEL: How many?

STANHOPE: Only one.

[*Another shell whines and shrieks and crashes near by. There is silence for a moment, then* STANHOPE *speaks again.*

Hurt, sir?

COLONEL: No. It's all right.

[STANHOPE, *pale and haggard, comes down the steps, followed by the* COLONEL.

STANHOPE (*calling up the steps*): Bring him down, sergeant-major.

S.-M. (*above*): Coming, sir.

STANHOPE (*to the* COLONEL): You won't want me, will you?

COLONEL: Well—er——

STANHOPE: I want to go and see those men.

COLONEL : Oh, all right.

[STANHOPE *goes to the door, making way for the* SERGEANT-MAJOR *to come down, followed by a bareheaded* GERMAN BOY, *in field grey, sobbing bitterly. Behind come two* SOLDIERS *with fixed bayonets.*

STANHOPE *goes up the steps.*

The SERGEANT-MAJOR *takes the* GERMAN BOY *by the arm and draws him into the centre of the dug-out to face the* COLONEL, *who has seated himself at the table. The two* SOLDIERS *stand behind.*

S.-M. (*soothingly to the* GERMAN BOY) : All right, sonny, we ain't going to 'urt you.

[*Suddenly the* BOY *falls on his knees and sobs out some words in broken English.*

GERMAN : Mercy—mister—mercy !

S.-M. : Come on, lad, get up. (*With a huge fist he takes the* BOY *by the collar and draws him to his feet.*)

[*The* BOY *sobs hysterically.*

The COLONEL *clears his throat and begins in somewhat poor German.*

COLONEL : Was ist sein Regiment ?

GERMAN : Wurtembergisches.

COLONEL : Was ist der nummer von sein Regiment ?

GERMAN : Zwanzig.

COLONEL (*making a note*) : Twentieth Wurtembergers. (*He looks up again.*) Wann kommen sie hier ?

GERMAN : Gestern abend.

COLONEL (*making a note and looking up again*) : Wo kommen sie her ?

GERMAN (*after a moment's thought*) : Mein Geburtsort ?

COLONEL (*forgetting himself for a moment*) : What's that ?

GERMAN (*in halting English*) : You—wish—to know—where I was—born ?

COLONEL : No ! What town did you come up to the line from ?

GERMAN (*after a little hesitation*) : I—do not tell you.

COLONEL : Oh, well, that's all right. (*To the* SERGEANT MAJOR.) Search him.

[*The* SERGEANT-MAJOR's *big fists grope over the* BOY's *pockets. He produces a small book.*

S.-M. (*giving it to the* COLONEL) : Looks like 'is pay-book, sir.

COLONEL (*looking eagerly into the book*) : Good.

[*The* SERGEANT-MAJOR *has found a pocket-book ; the* GERMAN BOY *clutches at it impulsively.*

S.-M. : 'Ere, stop that !

GERMAN : Lassen sie mich ! (*He pauses.*) Let—me—please—keep—that.

S.-M. (*very embarrassed*) : You let go ! (*He wrenches the case away and gives it to the* COLONEL.)

COLONEL (*glancing at the papers in the case*) : Look like letters. May be useful. Is that all, sergeant-major ?

S.-M. (*looking at a few articles in his hands*) : 'Ere's a few oddments, sir—bit o' string, sir ; little box o' fruit drops ; pocket-knife, sir ; bit o' cedar pencil—and a stick o' chocolate, sir.

COLONEL : Let him have those back, except the pocket-knife.

S.-M. : Very good, sir. (*He turns to the* GERMAN BOY *with a smile*) 'Ere you are, sonny.

[*The* GERMAN BOY *takes back the oddments.*

COLONEL : All right, sergeant-major. Send him straight back to my headquarters. I'll question him again there.

S.-M. : Very good, sir. (*He turns to the* GERMAN.) Come on, sonny, up you go. (*He points up the steps.*)

[*The* GERMAN BOY, *calm now, bows stiffly to the* COLONEL *and goes away, followed by the two* SOLDIERS and the SERGEANT-MAJOR.

The COLONEL *is deeply absorbed in the German's pay-book. He mutters "Splendid!" to himself, then looks at his watch and rises quickly.*

STANHOPE *comes slowly down the steps.*

COLONEL (*excitedly*) : Splendid, Stanhope ! We've got all we wanted—20th Wurtembergers ! His regiment came into the line last night. I must go right away and 'phone the brigadier. He'll be very pleased about it. It's a feather in our cap, Stanhope.

[STANHOPE *has given one look of astonishment at the* COLONEL *and strolled past him. He turns at the table and speaks in a dead voice.*

STANHOPE : How awfully nice—if the brigadier's pleased.

[*The* COLONEL *stares at* STANHOPE *and suddenly collects himself.*

COLONEL : Oh—er—what about the raiding-party—are they all safely back.

STANHOPE : Did you expect them to be all safely back, sir ?

COLONEL : Oh—er—what—er——

STANHOPE : Four men and Raleigh came safely back, sir.

COLONEL : Oh, I say, I'm sorry ! That's—er—six men and—er—Osborne ?

STANHOPE : Yes, sir.

COLONEL : I'm very sorry. Poor Osborne !

STANHOPE : Still it'll be awfully nice if the brigadier's pleased.

COLONEL : Don't be silly, Stanhope. Do you know—er—what happened to Osborne ?

STANHOPE : A hand grenade—while he was waiting for Raleigh.

COLONEL : I'm very sorry. And the six men ?

STANHOPE : Machine-gun bullets, I suppose.

COLONEL : Yes. I was afraid—er——

[*His words trail away ; he fidgets uneasily as* STANHOPE *looks at him with a pale, expressionless face.*

RALEIGH *comes slowly down the steps, walking as though he were asleep ; his hands are bleeding.*

The COLONEL *turns to the boy with enthusiasm.*

Very well done, Raleigh. Well done, my boy. I'll get you a Military Cross for this ! Splendid !

[RALEIGH *looks at the* COLONEL *and tries to speak. He raises his hand to his forehead and sways. The* COLONEL *takes him by the arm.*

Sit down here, my boy.

[RALEIGH *sits on the edge of* OSBORNE'S *bed.*

Have a good rest. Well, I must be off. (*He moves towards the steps, and, turning once more to* RALEIGH *as he leaves*) Very well done. (*With a quick glance at* STANHOPE, *the* COLONEL *goes away.*)

[*There is silence now in the trenches outside ; the last shell has whistled over and crashed. Dusk is beginning to fall over the German lines. The glow of Very lights begins to rise and fade against the evening sky.* STANHOPE *is staring dumbly at the table—at* OSBORNE'S *watch and ring. Presently he turns his haggard face towards* RALEIGH, *who sits with lowered head, looking at the palms of his hands.* STANHOPE *moves slowly across towards the doorway,*

and pauses to look down at RALEIGH. RALEIGH *looks up into* STANHOPE'S *face, and their eyes meet. When* STANHOPE *speaks, his voice is still expressionless and dead.*

STANHOPE : Must you sit on Osborne's bed ?

[*He turns and goes slowly up the steps.*

RALEIGH *rises unsteadily, murmurs* "Sorry" *and stands with lowered head.*

Heavy guns are booming miles away.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

Late evening on the same day.

The dug-out is lit quite festively by an unusual number of candles. Two champagne bottles stand prominent on the table. Dinner is over.

STANHOPE, *with a cigar between his teeth, lounges across the table, one elbow among the plates and mugs. His hair is ruffled ; there is a bright red flush on his cheeks. He has just made a remark which has sent* HIBBERT *and* TROTTER *into uproarious laughter ; he listens with a smile.* TROTTER *is sitting on the box to the right of the table, leaning back against the wall. A cigar is embedded in his podgy fingers ; his face is a shiny scarlet, with deep red patches below the ears. The three bottom buttons of his tunic are undone, and now and then his hand steals gently over his distended stomach.* HIBBERT *sits on the bed to the left, his thin white fingers nervously twitching the ash from his cigar. His pale face is shiny with sweat from the heat of the candles ; his laugh is high-pitched and excited.* TROTTER *speaks in a husky voice as the laughter dies away.*

TROTTER : And what did she say to that ?

STANHOPE : She said, " Not in these trousers "—in French.

[TROTTER *and* HIBBERT *burst into laughter again.*

TROTTER (*coughing and wheezing*) : Oh—dear-o-dear !

STANHOPE : I simply drew myself up and said, " Very well, mam'sel, have it your own way."

TROTTER : And she did ?

STANHOPE : No. She didn't.

[*Again the others laugh.* TROTTER *wipes a tear from his eye.*

TROTTER : Oh, skipper, you *are* a scream—and no mistake !

HIBBERT : I never forget picking up a couple of tarts one night and taking 'em out to dinner.

TROTTER (*winking at* STANHOPE) : 'E's orf again.

HIBBERT : We drank enough bubbly to sink a battleship——

STANHOPE : To *float* a battleship.

HIBBERT : Well—to float a battleship. Then I took 'em for a joy-ride out to Maidenhead—did sixty all the way. We danced a bit at Skindles', and drank a lot of port and muck. Then damned if I didn't lose the way coming back—got landed miles from anywhere. And those tarts began cursing me like hell—said I'd done it on purpose. I said if they didn't damn well shut up I'd chuck 'em both out in the road and leave 'em.

STANHOPE (*ironically*) : Hurrah ! That's the idea ! Treat 'em rough !

HIBBERT (*giggling*) : That shut 'em up all right ! Then I started doing about sixty down all sorts of roads—I went round a corner on two wheels with those girls' hair on end—didn't have any more trouble from *them* ! (*He chuckles at the memory, and takes an unsteady gulp of champagne.*)

STANHOPE : You're the sort of man who makes girls hard to please.

TROTTER (*heavily*) : Well, I never 'ad no motor-car ; my old lady and me used to walk ; legs is good enough for me.

STANHOPE : You satisfied with legs ?

TROTTER : *I* am—yes !

STANHOPE : Much cheaper.

HIBBERT (*laughing delightedly*) : That's damn good !

STANHOPE (*raising his mug*) : Well, here's a toast to legs—God bless 'em !

HIBBERT (*raising his mug*) : Good old legs !

TROTTER (*raising his mug*) : Shanks's mare.

STANHOPE : Shanks's *what* ?

TROTTER : Shanks's mare, they call 'em.

STANHOPE : Call what ?

TROTTER : Why—legs.

HIBBERT (*almost screaming with delight*) : Oh, Trotter ! you're a *dream* !

TROTTER (*turning a baleful eye on* HIBBERT) : You've 'ad too much champagne, you 'ave.

[HIBBERT *takes a leather case from his pocket and produces some picture post-cards.*

HIBBERT : I say, I've never shown you these, have I ?

[*He hands them one by one to* STANHOPE, *smiling up into* STANHOPE'S *face for approval.*

STANHOPE : Where did you get these from ?

HIBBERT : In Bethune. (*He hands up a card.*) *She's* all right, isn't she ?

STANHOPE : Too fat.

HIBBERT (*looking over* STANHOPE'S *shoulder*) : Oh, I don't know.

STANHOPE : Much too fat. (*He hands the card to* TROTTER.) What do you think, Trotter ?

[TROTTER *takes a pair of pince-nez from his pocket, balances them on his fat nose, and looks at the picture.*

HIBBERT : All right, isn't she ?

TROTTER : Well, I don't know. If you ask me, I'd rather 'ave a decent picture of Margate Pier.

HIBBERT (*impatiently*) : Oh, you don't understand *art.* (*He hands another card to* STANHOPE.) There's a nice pair of legs for you.

STANHOPE : Too thin—aren't they, Trotter ? (*He hands* TROTTER *the card.*)

TROTTER (*after some thought*) : Scraggy, I call 'em.

HIBBERT (*handing* STANHOPE *another card*) : *That's* the one I like best.

STANHOPE : Not bad.

HIBBERT : Glorious bedroom eyes.

STANHOPE : She's all right.

HIBBERT : Ever see that show *Zip* at the Hippodrome ? Couple of damn fine girls in that—twins. Did you see 'em, skipper ?

STANHOPE (*wearily*) : I don't know—seen stacks of shows—can't remember them all. (*He brightens up.*) Now then, swallow up that bubbly ! Hi ! Mason !

MASON : Yessir !

[MASON *appears.*

STANHOPE : Bring some whiskey.

MASON : Yessir.

[*He disappears.*

TROTTER : What ? Whiskey on top of champagne ?

STANHOPE : Why not ? It's all right.

TROTTER : Well, I don't know ; doesn't sound right to me. I feel as if somebody's blown me up with a bicycle pump.

STANHOPE : You look it, too.

TROTTER (*blowing a stream of cigar smoke up to the dark ceiling*) : Any'ow, it was a jolly fine bit o' chicken—and I'd go a mile any day for a chunk o' that jam pudding.

[MASON *brings a bottle of whiskey.*

STANHOPE : Your pudding's made Mr. Trotter feel all blown out, Mason.

MASON : I'm sorry, sir ; it wasn't meant, sir.

TROTTER : It was all right, Mason, take it from me. I know a decent bit o' pudden when I see it.

MASON : It was only boiled ration biscuits and jam, sir. (*He turns to* STANHOPE.) I thought I better tell you, sir—this is the last bottle.

STANHOPE : The last bottle ! Why, damn it, we brought six !

MASON : I know, sir. But five's gone.

STANHOPE : Where the devil's it gone to ?

MASON : Well, sir, you remember there was one on the first night—and then one——

STANHOPE : Oh, for Lord's sake don't go through them one by one ; this'll last till sunrise. (*He turns to* TROTTER *and* HIBBERT.) Sunrise to-morrow, my lads !

TROTTER : Oh, forget that.

STANHOPE : You bet we will ! Now then ! Who's for a spot of whiskey ?

TROTTER : I reckon I'm about full up. I'd like a nice cup o' tea, Mason.

MASON : Very good, sir.

[*He goes out.*

STANHOPE : Tea !

TROTTER : Yes. That's what I want. Decent cup o' tea. Still, I'll just 'ave about a spoonful o' whiskey—got a touch of pulpitations.

STANHOPE : Here you are—say when !

TROTTER : Wo ! That's enough !

STANHOPE : You'll have a decent spot, won't you, Hibbert ?

HIBBERT : Yes. I'm game !

TROTTER (*stifling a hiccup*) : Just a cup o' tea—then I'll go and relieve young Raleigh. Pity 'e didn't come down to supper.

STANHOPE : I told him to. I told him to come down for an hour and let the sergeant-major take over.

TROTTER : I wonder why 'e didn't come.

HIBBERT : That lad's too keen on his " duty." He told me he liked being up there with the men better than down here with us.

STANHOPE (*quietly*) : He *said* that ?

HIBBERT : Yes. I told him about the chicken and champagne and cigars—and he stared at me and said, " You're not having that, are you ? " —just as if he thought we were going to chuck it away !

TROTTER : I reckon that raid shook 'im up more'n we thought. I like that youngster. 'E's got pluck. Strong lad, too—the way he came back through the smoke after that raid, carrying that Boche under 'is arm like a baby.

HIBBERT : Did you see him afterwards, though ? He came into that dug-out and never said a word—didn't seem to know where he was.

TROTTER : Well, 'e's only a lad.

STANHOPE (*to* HIBBERT) : He actually told you he preferred being up with the men better than down here ?

HIBBERT : That's what he said.

TROTTER : Well, I 'ope 'e gets the M.C., that's all ; 'e's just the kid I'd like if ever I 'ave a kid —strong and plucky.

STANHOPE : Oh, for God's sake forget that bloody raid ! Think I want to talk about it ?

TROTTER (*surprised*) : No—but, after all——

STANHOPE : Well—shut up !

TROTTER (*uneasily*) : All right—all right.

STANHOPE : We were having a jolly decent evening till you started blabbing about the war.

TROTTER : *I* didn't start it.

STANHOPE : You did.

TROTTER : You began it about——

STANHOPE : Well, for God's sake stop it, then !

TROTTER : All right—all right.

HIBBERT : Did I ever tell you the story about the girl I met in Soho ?

STANHOPE : I don't know—I expect you did.

HIBBERT (*undismayed*) : It'll amuse you. I'd been to a dance, and I was coming home quite late——

STANHOPE : Yes, and it's late now. You go on duty at eleven. You better go and get some sleep.

HIBBERT : It's all right. I'm as fresh as a daisy.

STANHOPE : You may be. But go to bed.

HIBBERT : What ?

STANHOPE (*louder*) : I said, " Go to bed ! "

HIBBERT : I say, that's a nice end to a jolly evening !

STANHOPE : I'm sorry. I'm tired.

HIBBERT (*perkily*) : Well, *you* better go to bed !

[*There is silence.* STANHOPE *looks at* HIBBERT, *who sniggers.*

STANHOPE : What was that you said ?

HIBBERT : I was only joking.

STANHOPE : I asked you what you said.

HIBBERT : I said, " *You* better go to bed."

[STANHOPE's *flushed face is looking full into* HIBBERT's. HIBBERT *gives the ghost of a snigger.*

STANHOPE : Clear out of here !

HIBBERT (*rising unsteadily*) : What—what d'you mean ?

STANHOPE : Get out of here, for God's sake !

HIBBERT (*blustering*) : I say—look here——

STANHOPE : Get out of my sight !

[*With a frightened glance at* STANHOPE, HIBBERT *sneaks quietly away into his dug-out.*

There is silence, and the guns can be heard—deep and ominous.

Little worm gets on my nerves.

TROTTER : Poor little bloke. Never seen 'im so cheerful before out 'ere.

STANHOPE : Doesn't he nearly drive you mad ?

TROTTER : I reckon 'e only wanted to keep cheerful.

STANHOPE : Doesn't his repulsive little mind make you *sick* ?

[MASON *brings* TROTTER's *mug of tea and goes away.*

I envy you, Trotter. Nothing upsets you, does it ? You're always the same.

TROTTER : Always the same, am I ? (*He sighs.*) Little you know——

STANHOPE : You never get sick to death of everything, or so happy you want to sing.

TROTTER : I don't know—I whistle sometimes.

STANHOPE : But you always *feel* the same.

TROTTER : I feel all blown out now.

[*There is a pause.* TROTTER *sips his tea and* STANHOPE *takes a whiskey.*

'Ere's 'Ibbert's post-cards. Funny a bloke carrying pictures like this about. Satisfies 'is lust, I s'pose—poor little feller. (*He rises.*) Well, I'll go and relieve young Raleigh. Pity 'e didn't come down to supper. (*He tries to button his tunic, without success. He buckles his webbing belt over his unbuttoned tunic, puts on his helmet, and slings his respirator over his shoulder.*) Well, cheero !

STANHOPE : You realise you're my second-in-command now, don't you ?

TROTTER : Well, you 'adn't said nothing about it, but——

STANHOPE : Well, you are.

TROTTER : Righto, skipper. (*He pauses.*) Thanks. (*He goes towards the door.*) I won't let you down.

STANHOPE : After your duty, have a decent sleep. We must be ready at half-past five.

TROTTER : Righto, skipper. Well, I'll be going up. Give me a chance to cool off up there. It's as 'ot as 'ell in 'ere, with all them damn candles burning.

STANHOPE : I suppose it is. My head's nearly splitting. (*He blows out three of the candles, leaving the dim light of one.*)

TROTTER (*half up the steps*) : There's a bit of a mist rising.

STANHOPE (*dully*) : Is there ?

[TROTTER *disappears into the night.*

STANHOPE *broods over the table.*

Mason !

MASON (*outside*) : Yessir !

STANHOPE : You can bring Mr. Raleigh's dinner.

MASON : Very good, sir.

[MASON *brings a plate of steaming food, gathering up and taking away some of the used crockery. Presently* RALEIGH *comes slowly down the steps. He pauses at the bottom, takes off his helmet, and hesitates.*

STANHOPE *is sitting at the table puffing at the remains of his cigar. There is silence except for the rumble of the guns.*

STANHOPE : I thought I told you to come down to dinner at eight o'clock ?

RALEIGH : Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't think you—er——

STANHOPE : Well ? You didn't think I—er—what ?

RALEIGH : I didn't think you'd—you'd mind—if I didn't.

STANHOPE : I see. And why do you think I asked you—if I didn't mind ?

RALEIGH : I'm sorry.

STANHOPE : Well, we've kept your dinner. It's ready for you here.

RALEIGH : Oh, it's awfully good of you to have kept it for me, but—I—I had something to eat up there.

STANHOPE : You—had something to eat up there ? What do you mean, exactly ?

RALEIGH : They brought the tea round while I was on duty. I had a cup, and some bread and cheese.

STANHOPE : Are you telling me—you've been feeding with the men ?

RALEIGH : Well, Sergeant Baker suggested——

STANHOPE : So you take your orders from Sergeant Baker, do you ?

RALEIGH : No, but——

STANHOPE : You eat the men's rations when there's barely enough for each man ?

RALEIGH : They asked me to share.

STANHOPE : Now, look here. I know you're new to this, but I thought you'd have the common sense to leave the men alone to their meals. Do you think they want an officer prowling round eating their rations, and sucking up to them like that ? My officers are here to be respected—not laughed at.

RALEIGH : Why did they ask me—if they didn't mean it ?

STANHOPE : Don't you realise they were making a fool of you ?

RALEIGH : Why should they ?

STANHOPE : So you know more about my men than I do ?

[*There is silence.* RALEIGH *is facing* STANHOPE *squarely.*

RALEIGH : I'm sorry then—if I was wrong.

STANHOPE : Sit down.

RALEIGH : It's all right, thanks.

STANHOPE (*suddenly shouting*) : *Sit down !*

[RALEIGH *sits on the box to the right of the table.* STANHOPE *speaks quietly again.*

I understand you prefer being up there with the men than down here with us ?

RALEIGH : I don't see what you mean.

STANHOPE : What did you tell Hibbert ?

RALEIGH : Hibbert ? I—I didn't say——

STANHOPE : Don't lie.

RALEIGH (*rising*) : I'm not lying ! Why should I —lie ?

STANHOPE : Then why didn't you come down to supper when I told you to ?

RALEIGH : I—I wasn't hungry. I had rather a headache. It's cooler up there.

STANHOPE : You insulted Trotter and Hibbert by not coming. You realise that, I suppose ?

RALEIGH : I didn't mean to do anything like that.

STANHOPE : Well, you did. You know now—don't you ?

[RALEIGH *makes no reply. He is trying to understand why* STANHOPE's *temper has risen to a trembling fury.* STANHOPE *can scarcely control his voice.*

(*Loudly.*) I say—you *know* now, don't you ?

RALEIGH : Yes, I'm sorry.

STANHOPE : My officers work *together.* I'll have no damn prigs.

RALEIGH : I'll speak to Trotter and Hibbert. I didn't realise——

[STANHOPE *raises his cigar. His hand trembles so violently that he can scarcely take the cigar between his teeth.* RALEIGH *looks at* STANHOPE, *fascinated and horrified.*

STANHOPE : What are you looking at ?

RALEIGH (*lowering his head*) : Nothing.

STANHOPE : Anything—*funny* about me ?

RALEIGH : No.

[*After a moment's silence,* RALEIGH *speaks in a low, halting voice.*

I'm awfully sorry, Dennis, if—if I annoyed you by coming to your company.

STANHOPE : What on *earth* are you talking about ? What do you mean ?

RALEIGH : You resent my being here.

STANHOPE : Resent you *being* here ?

RALEIGH : Ever since I came——

STANHOPE : I don't know what you mean. I resent you being a damn fool, that's all. (*There is a pause.*) Better eat your dinner before it's cold.

RALEIGH : I'm not hungry, thanks.

STANHOPE : Oh, for God's sake, sit down and eat it like a man !

RALEIGH : I can't eat it, thanks.

STANHOPE (*shouting*) : Are you going to eat your dinner ?

RALEIGH : Good God ! Don't you understand ? How *can* I sit down and eat that—when—(*his voice is nearly breaking*)—when Osborne's—lying—out there——

[STANHOPE *rises slowly. His eyes are wide and staring ; he is fighting for breath, and his words come brokenly.*

STANHOPE : My God ! You bloody little swine ! You think I don't care—you think you're the only soul that cares !

RALEIGH : And yet you can sit there and drink champagne—and smoke cigars——

STANHOPE : The one man I could trust—my best friend—the one man I could talk to as man to man—who understood everything—and you think I don't care——

RALEIGH : But how can you when—— ?

STANHOPE : To forget, you little fool—to forget ! D'you understand ? To forget ! You think there's no limit to what a man can bear ?

[*He turns quickly from* RALEIGH *and goes to the dark corner by* OSBORNE'S *bed. He stands with his face towards the wall, his shoulders heaving as he fights for breath.*

RALEIGH : I'm awfully sorry, Dennis. I—I didn't understand.

[STANHOPE *makes no reply.*

You don't know how—I——

STANHOPE : Go away, please—leave me alone.

RALEIGH : Can't I——

[STANHOPE *turns wildly upon* RALEIGH.

STANHOPE : Oh, get out ! For God's sake, get out !

[RALEIGH *goes away into his dug-out, and* STANHOPE *is alone. The Very lights rise and fall outside, softly breaking the darkness with their glow —sometimes steel-blue, sometimes grey. Through the night there comes the impatient grumble of gunfire that never dies away.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE III

Towards dawn. The candles are no longer burning. The intense darkness of the dug-out is softened by the glow of the Very lights in the sky beyond the doorway. There is no sound except the distant mutter of the guns.

A man comes from the servant's dug-out ; for a moment his head and shoulders stand out black against the glowing sky, then he passes on into the darkness by the table. There comes the rasp of a striking match—a tiny flame—and a candle gleams. MASON *blinks in the light and turns to* STANHOPE'S *bed.* STANHOPE *lies huddled with his blanket drawn tightly round him.*

MASON (*softly*) : Sir——

[STANHOPE *does not move ;* MASON *shakes him gently by the knee.*

(*A little louder*) Sir——

STANHOPE : Yes ? (*There is a pause.*) That you, Mason ?

MASON : 'Arf-past five, sir.

STANHOPE : Oh, right. (*He raises himself on his elbow.*) I was only half asleep. I keep on waking up. It's so frightfully cold in here.

MASON : It's a coid dug-out, this one, sir. I've made some 'ot tea.

STANHOPE : Good. You might bring me some.

MASON : Right you are, sir.

STANHOPE : And take some to the officers in there—and wake them up.

MASON : Very good, sir.

[MASON *goes to his dug-out.*

STANHOPE *rises stiffly from his bed, shudders from the cold, and slowly begins putting his equipment on.*

TROTTER *wanders in from his dug-out vigorously lathering his face. He is dressed, except for his collar.*

TROTTER : Wash and brush-up, tuppence !

STANHOPE (*looking up, surprised*) : Hullo ! I thought you were asleep.

TROTTER : I 'ad a decent sleep when I come off dooty. What's the time ?

STANHOPE : Half-past five. It'll be getting light soon. You better buck up.

TROTTER : All right. *I* shan't be long. Sounds quiet enough out there.

STANHOPE : Yes.

[MASON *brings four mugs of tea.*

TROTTER : Ah ! that's what I want. A decent cup of tea.

MASON (*putting a mug on the table for* STANHOPE) : Nice and 'ot, sir. I've cut a packet of sambridges for each gentleman, sir.

STANHOPE : Good.

[MASON *takes the other mugs of tea into the right-hand dug-out.* TROTTER *follows, lathering with gusto.*

STANHOPE : You might give Hibbert and Raleigh a call.

TROTTER : I woke 'em up, skipper. They're getting their things on.

[MASON *returns.*

STANHOPE : When you've cleared up your kitchen, you must dress and join your platoon in the line.

MASON : Very good, sir.

STANHOPE : If things are going well at eleven o'clock, come down here and do your best to get some lunch for us. We shall come down in turn as we can.

MASON : Very good, sir.

[STANHOPE *sits at the table and begins to write a short report. The first sign of dawn is beginning to gleam in the dark sky.* STANHOPE *calls "Runner!" as he writes.*

A SOLDIER *comes from the servant's dug-out.*

STANHOPE (*folding the note*) : Take this to Battalion Headquarters. There's no reply.

SOLDIER : Yessir.

[*The* SOLDIER *salutes and goes up the steps.*

A plaintive noise comes from the other dug-out. TROTTER *is singing "There's a long, long trail a-winding."* STANHOPE *listens for a moment, then rises, takes a few small coins from his pocket, and throws them into* TROTTER'S *dug-out. The singing stops abruptly. After a moment* TROTTER'S *voice comes.*

TROTTER: Thank you kindly, gov'nor!

[*The* SERGEANT-MAJOR *comes down the steps.*

STANHOPE : Morning, sergeant-major.

S.-M. : Morning, sir. Wiring parties are just in, sir. Made a decent job of it—right down to the support line.

STANHOPE : Good. Everything quiet ?

S.-M. : It's all right opposite 'ere, sir, but the guns are goin' 'ard down south. 'Eavy bombardment. Not sure if it ain't spreading up this way, sir.

STANHOPE : Very likely it is. The officers are coming up in a minute. They'll stand by with their platoons. I must stay here awhile in case of messages. I shall come up directly things begin to happen.

S.-M. : Very good, sir.

STANHOPE : Are the men having their tea ?

S.-M. : Yessir.

STANHOPE : Let 'em have a decent drop of rum.

S.-M. : About 'arf again, sir ?

STANHOPE : Yes.

S.-M. : If the attack don't come, sir, 'ow long are we to stand-to ?

STANHOPE : We must expect the attack any time up till midday. After then I don't think it'll come till to-morrow.

S.-M. : Very good, sir.

STANHOPE : We must naturally make our plans to meet things as they happen.

S.-M. : Quite, sir.

STANHOPE : All right, sergeant-major. I'll see you up there soon.

S.-M. : Yessir.

[*He salutes and goes away.*

MASON *brings in four little packets of sandwiches, and puts one packet on the table for* STANHOPE.

MASON : Your sambridges, sir. 'Arf bully beef and 'arf sardine. Sardine on top, sir.

STANHOPE : How delicious. No *pâté de foie gras* ?

MASON : No what, sir ?

STANHOPE : No *pâté de foie gras* ?

MASON : No, sir. The milkman 'asn't been yet.

[MASON *takes the other parcels to the left-hand dug-out.*

STANHOPE *pours a little whiskey into his tea and the remainder of the contents of the bottle into his flask.*

MASON *returns.*

STANHOPE : Get dressed as soon as you can.

MASON : Yessir.

[MASON *goes out.*

TROTTER *comes in, fully dressed for the line.*

TROTTER : All ready, skipper. Want me to go up ?

STANHOPE : Yes. I think so. Go right round the line and see everything's all right. I'll be up soon.

[*Suddenly there comes the faint whistle and thud of falling shells—a few seconds between each.* STANHOPE *and* TROTTER *listen intently, four shells fall, then silence.*

TROTTER : 'Ullo, 'ullo.

[STANHOPE *strides to the doorway, goes up a few steps, and looks out into the night. He comes slowly back.*

STANHOPE : Over on Lancer's Alley—somewhere by the reserve line.

[*There comes the louder thud of three more shells.*

TROTTER : That's nearer.

STANHOPE : Better go up, Trotter. Call the others.

TROTTER (*at the left-hand dug-out*) : 'Ibbert ! Raleigh ! come on ! (*He lights a cigarette over the candle,—lingers a moment, and slowly goes up the steps.*) Cheero, skipper. See you later.

STANHOPE : Send your runner down to tell me how things are going.

TROTTER : Righto.

[TROTTER *disappears into the dark.*

A vague white line of dawn is broadening above the dark trench wall outside. STANHOPE *sits at the table and sips his tea. He takes a cigarette and lights it with a quivering hand.*

RALEIGH *comes from his dug-out.*

STANHOPE *lowers his head and writes in his note-book.*

RALEIGH : Do you want me to go up ?

STANHOPE (*without looking up*) : Yes. Trotter's gone.

RALEIGH : Right. (*He goes to the steps and turns shyly.*) Cheero—Stanhope.

STANHOPE (*still writing with lowered head*) : Cheero, Raleigh. I shall be coming up soon. (RALEIGH *goes up the steps.*)

[STANHOPE *stops writing, raises his head, and listens. The shells are falling steadily now. He glances towards the left-hand dug-out and calls :*

Hibbert !

[*There is no reply. He slowly rises and goes to the left-hand dug-out doorway, He calls again—louder :*

Hibbert ! ! (*He looks into the doorway and says*) What are you doing ?

[HIBBERT *appears. He is very pale ; he moves as if half asleep.*

Come along, man !

HIBBERT : You want me to go up now ?

STANHOPE : Of course I do. The others have gone.

HIBBERT : Got a drop of water ?

STANHOPE : What d'you want water for ?

HIBBERT : I'm so frightfully thirsty. All that champagne and stuff—dried my mouth up.

[STANHOPE *pours a drop of water into a mug and gives it to* HIBBERT.

STANHOPE : Here you are. Didn't you have any tea ?

HIBBERT : Yes. It was a bit sweet, though.

[*The shelling is steadily increasing, and now, above the lighter "crush" of the smaller shells, there comes the deep, resounding "boom" of Minenwerfer.* HIBBERT *sips his water very slowly, rinsing his mouth deliberately with each sip.* STANHOPE *is by the doorway, looking up into the trench. He has just turned away as a sonorous drawn-out call comes floating through the dawn :* "Stretcher bear-ers !"

STANHOPE *half turns, then faces* HIBBERT.

STANHOPE : Come on. Buck up.

HIBBERT : There's no appalling hurry, is there ?

STANHOPE : No hurry ! Why d'you think the others have gone up ?

HIBBERT (*slowly*) : What ? Trotter and Raleigh ?

STANHOPE (*sharply*) : Wake up, man ! What the devil's the matter with you ?

[HIBBERT *slowly puts down his mug.*

HIBBERT : Champagne dries the mouth up so. Makes the tongue feel like a bit of paper.

[*There is a slight pause.*

STANHOPE : The longer you stay here, the harder it'll be to go up.

HIBBERT : Good Lord ! You don't think I'm——

STANHOPE : You're just wasting as much time as you can.

HIBBERT : Well, damn it, it's no good going up till I feel fit. Let's just have another spot of water.

[HIBBERT *takes the jug and pours out a little more water. He is the picture of misery.* STANHOPE *stands impatiently beside him.*

MASON *appears from his dug-out, fully dressed for the line, his rifle slung over his shoulder.*

MASON : I'll go right along, sir. I've made up the fire to last a good three hours—if you don't mind me popping down about nine o'clock to 'ave a look at it.

STANHOPE : All right, Mason. Mr. Hibbert's coming up now. You can go along with him.

MASON (*to* HIBBERT) : I'd like to come along of you if you don't mind, sir. I ain't bin up in this part of the front line. Don't want to get lorst.

STANHOPE : Mr. Hibbert'll show you the way up. (*He turns to* HIBBERT.) Keep your men against the back wall of the trench as long as the shells are dropping behind. Cheero !

[HIBBERT *looks at* STANHOPE *for a moment, then with a slight smile, he goes slowly up the steps and into the trench,* MASON *following behind.*

A dark figure stands out against the pale sky ; comes hurrying down the steps—a PRIVATE SOLDIER, *out of breath and excited.*

Yes ?

SOLDIER : Message from Mr. Trotter, sir. Shells falling mostly behind support line. Minnies along front line.

STANHOPE : Who's just been hit ?

SOLDIER : Corporal Ross, I think it was, sir. Minnie dropped in the trench at the corner—just as I come away.

[*The* SERGEANT-MAJOR *comes down the steps, very much out of breath.*

STANHOPE (*to the* SOLDIER) : All right, thanks.

[*The* SOLDIER *salutes, and goes up the steps slower than he came.*

S.-M. : Beginning to get 'ot, sir.

STANHOPE : Corporal Ross hit ?

S.-M. : Yessir.

STANHOPE : Badly ?

S.-M. : Pretty badly, sir.

STANHOPE : Most of the shelling's going over, isn't it ?

S.-M. : Most of the *shells* is be'ind, sir, but there's Minnies and rifle grenades along the front line. Pretty 'ot it's getting, sir. They're attacking down south—there's rifle fire.

STANHOPE : All right, sergeant-major ; thanks.

S.-M. : What I come to ask, sir—what about the wounded—getting 'em down, sir ? The shelling's pretty thick over Lancer's Alley.

STANHOPE : What about Fosse Way ?

S.-M. : Pretty bad there, too, sir.

STANHOPE : Don't try then. Take anyone badly hit down into the big dug-out on the right. Let the stretcher-bearers do what they can there.

S.-M. : Very good, sir.

STANHOPE : Only Corporal Ross hit ?

S.-M. : That's all, sir——

[*Again there comes the drawn-out call—several times as it is passed from man to man :* " Stretcher bear-ers ! "

The SERGEANT-MAJOR'S *eyes meet* STANHOPE'S. *He turns and goes up the steps.*

STANHOPE *is alone. Flying fragments of shell whistle and hiss and moan overhead. The sharp " crack " of the rifle grenades, the thud of the shells, and the boom of the Minenwerfer mingle together in a muffled roar.* STANHOPE *takes his belt from the table and buckles it on, puts his revolver lanyard round his neck, and drops his flask and sandwiches into his pocket.*

The SERGEANT-MAJOR *reappears and comes hurrying down the steps.*

STANHOPE (*turning quickly*) : What is it, sergeant-major ?

S.-M. : Mr. Raleigh, sir——

STANHOPE : What !

S.-M. : Mr. Raleigh's been 'it, sir. Bit of shell's got 'im in the back.

STANHOPE : Badly ?

S.-M. : 'Fraid it's broke 'is spine, sir ; can't move 'is legs.

STANHOPE : Bring him down here.

S.-M. : Down 'ere, sir ?

STANHOPE (*shouting*) : Yes ! Down here—quickly !

The SERGEANT-MAJOR *hurries up the steps. A shell screams and bursts very near. The* SERGEANT-MAJOR *shrinks back and throws his hand across his face, as though a human hand could ward off the hot flying pieces. He stumbles on again into the trench, and hurriedly away.*

STANHOPE *is by* OSBORNE'S *bed, fumbling a blanket over it. He takes a trench coat off the wall and rolls it for a pillow. He goes to his own bed, takes up his blanket, and turns as the* SERGEANT-MAJOR *comes carefully down the steps carrying* RALEIGH *like a child in his huge arms.*

(*With blanket ready.*) Lay him down there.

S.-M. : 'E's fainted, sir. 'E was conscious when I picked 'im up.

The SERGEANT-MAJOR *lays the boy gently on the bed ; he draws away his hands, looks furtively at the palms, and wipes the blood on the sides of his trousers.* STANHOPE *covers* RALEIGH *with his blanket, looks intently at the boy, and turns to the* SERGEANT-MAJOR.

STANHOPE : Have they dressed the wound ?

S.-M. : They've just put a pad on it, sir. Can't do no more.

STANHOPE : Go at once and bring two men with a stretcher.

S.-M. : We'll never get 'im down, sir, with them shells falling on Lancer's Alley.

STANHOPE : Did you hear what I said ? Go and get two men with a stretcher.

S.-M. (*after a moment's hesitation*) : Very good, sir.

[*The* SERGEANT-MAJOR *goes slowly away.*

STANHOPE *turns to* RALEIGH *once more, then goes to the table, pushes his handkerchief into the water-jug, and brings it, wringing wet, to* RALEIGH'S *bed. He bathes the boy's face. Presently* RALEIGH *gives a little moan, opens his eyes, and turns his head.*

RALEIGH : Hullo—Dennis——

STANHOPE : Well, Jimmy—(*he smiles*)—you got one quickly.

[*There is silence for a while.* STANHOPE *is sitting on a box beside* RALEIGH. *Presently* RALEIGH *speaks again—in a wondering voice.*

RALEIGH : Why—how did I get down here ?

STANHOPE : Sergeant-major brought you down.

[RALEIGH *speaks again, vaguely, trying to recollect.*

RALEIGH : Something—hit me in the back—knocked me clean over—sort of—winded me—— I'm all right now. (*He tries to rise.*)

STANHOPE : Steady, old boy. Just lie there quietly for a bit.

RALEIGH : I'll be better if I get up and walk about. It happened once before—I got kicked in just the same place at Rugger ; it—it soon wore off. It—it just numbs you for a bit. (*There is a pause.*) What's that rumbling noise ?

STANHOPE : The guns are making a bit of a row.

RALEIGH : Our guns ?

STANHOPE : No. Mostly theirs.

[*Again there is silence in the dug-out. A very faint rose light is beginning to glow in the dawn sky.* RALEIGH *speaks again—uneasily.*

RALEIGH : I say—Dennis——

STANHOPE : Yes, old boy ?

RALEIGH: It—it hasn't gone through, has it ? It only just hit me ?—and knocked me down ?

STANHOPE : It's just gone through a bit, Jimmy.

RALEIGH : I won't have to—go on lying here ?

STANHOPE : I'm going to have you taken away.

RALEIGH : Away ? Where ?

STANHOPE : Down to the dressing-station—then hospital—then home. (*He smiles.*) You've got a Blighty one, Jimmy.

RALEIGH : But I—I can't go home just for—for a knock in the back. (*He stirs restlessly.*) I'm certain I'll be better if—if I get up. (*He tries to raise himself, and gives a sudden cry.*) Oh—God ! It does hurt !

STANHOPE : It's bound to hurt, Jimmy.

RALEIGH : What's—on my legs ? Something holding them down——

STANHOPE : It's all right, old chap ; it's just the shock—numbed them.

[*Again there is a pause. When* RALEIGH *speaks, there is a different note in his voice.*

RALEIGH : It's awfully decent of you to bother, Dennis. I feel rotten lying here—everybody else—up there.

STANHOPE : It's not your fault, Jimmy.

RALEIGH : So—damn—silly—getting hit. (*Pause.*) Is there—just a drop of water ?

STANHOPE (*rising quickly*) : Sure. I've got some here.

[*He pours some water into the mug and brings it to* RALEIGH.

(*Cheerfully.*) Got some tea-leaves in it. D'you mind ?

RALEIGH : No. That's all right—thanks——

[STANHOPE *holds the mug to* RALEIGH'S *lips, and the boy drinks.*

I say, Dennis, don't you wait—if—if you want to be getting on.

STANHOPE : It's quite all right, Jimmy.

RALEIGH : Can you stay for a bit ?

STANHOPE : Of course I can.

RALEIGH (*faintly*) : Thanks awfully.

[*There is quiet in the dug-out for a long time.* STANHOPE *sits with one hand on* RALEIGH'S *arm, and* RALEIGH *lies very still. Presently he speaks again—hardly above a whisper.*

Dennis——

STANHOPE : Yes, old boy ?

RALEIGH : Could we have a light ? It's—it's so frightfully dark and cold.

STANHOPE (*rising*) : Sure ! I'll bring a candle and get another blanket.

[STANHOPE *goes to the left-hand dug-out, and* RALEIGH *is alone, very still and quiet, on* OSBORNE'S *bed. The faint rosy glow of the dawn is deepening to an angry red. The grey night sky is dissolving, and the stars begin to go. A tiny sound comes from where* RALEIGH *is lying—something between a sob and a*

moan. STANHOPE *comes back with a blanket. He takes a candle from the table and carries it to* RALEIGH'S *bed. He puts it on the box beside* RALEIGH *and speaks cheerfully.*

Is that better, Jimmy ? (RALEIGH *makes no sign.*) Jimmy——

Still RALEIGH *is quiet.* STANHOPE *gently takes his hand. There is a long silence.* STANHOPE *lowers* RALEIGH'S *hand to the bed, rises, and takes the candle back to the table. He sits on the bench behind the table with his back to the wall, and stares listlessly across at the boy on* OSBORNE'S *bed. The solitary candle-flame throws up the lines on his pale, drawn face, and the dark shadows under his tired eyes. The thudding of the shells rises and falls like an angry sea.*

A PRIVATE SOLDIER *comes scrambling down the steps, his round, red face wet with perspiration, his chest heaving for breath.*

SOLDIER : Message from Mr. Trotter, sir—will you come at once.

[STANHOPE *gazes round at the* SOLDIER—*and makes no other sign.*

Mr. Trotter, sir—says will you come at once ?

[STANHOPE *rises stiffly and takes his helmet from the table.*

STANHOPE : All right, Broughton, I'm coming.

[*The* SOLDIER *turns and goes away.*

STANHOPE *pauses for a moment by* OSBORNE'S *bed and lightly runs his fingers over* RALEIGH'S *tousled hair. He goes stiffly up the steps, his tall figure black against the dawn sky.*

The shelling has risen to a great fury. The solitary candle burns with a steady flame, and RALEIGH *lies in the shadows. The whine of a shell rises to a*

shriek and bursts on the dug-out roof. The shock stabs out the candle-flame ; the timber props of the door cave slowly in, sandbags fall and block the passage to the open air.

There is darkness in the dug-out. Here and there the red dawn glows through the jagged holes of the broken doorway.

Very faintly there comes the dull rattle of machine-guns and the fevered spatter of rifle fire.

THE PLAY ENDS

YOUNG WOODLEY

JOHN VAN DRUTEN

YOUNG WOODLEY

A PLAY

in three Acts

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CHARACTERS

COPE	A Fag
VINING	House Prefects
AINGER	House Prefects
MILNER	House Prefects
WOODLEY	House Prefects
LAURA SIMMONS	
SIMMONS	Housemaster
PARLOURMAID	
MR. WOODLEY	

SCENES

ACT I: The Prefects' Room in Tree House, Mallowhurst.

ACT II: Mrs. Simmons' drawing-room in the same. Three weeks later.

ACT III: SCENE I

Same as Act One. . . . Two days later.

SCENE II

Same as Act Two. . . . The following afternoon.

ACT I

SCENE : *The Prefects' Room in the Tree House, Mallowhurst.*

TIME : *About five o'clock on a May afternoon.*

A large bright room, with windows in the R. wall looking on to a distant view of the playing fields. Below the windows, an impromptu window seat made out of cushions, cretonne and packing cases. The door is in the back wall R., between it and the left a large wooden settee littered with motor papers, magazines, books, etc. Fireplace L.C. with an easy chair facing it, and another above it facing the audience. A large cupboard left of the back wall. A large table, on which the remains of a tea are spread, fills the right half of the stage. Three chairs above it and on each side. The table faces longwise to the audience. Other chairs against the walls; a Decca gramophone and a pile of records in corner L. on small table. The walls are hung with Cricket and Rugby groups, Harrison Fishers and Kirchners. The room is strewn with books, blazers, cricket boots, bats, and other impedimenta.

When the curtain rises, COPE, *a small fag of about fourteen, is clearing away the tea things. He sticks his finger in jam pot, licks it and then tears piece off the loaf, puts that in the jam and then eats that. He piles dirty crockery on tray; puts cake, loaf, butter, etc., into the cupboard. A clock on the mantelpiece strikes five. He looks at it agitatedly. The door opens,* AINGER, VINING *and* MILNER *come in.* VINING *and* MILNER *are about eighteen,* AINGER *is nearing nineteen, good-looking and athletic.* VINING *is rather coarse and too well dressed.* MILNER *pleasant and*

agreeable. AINGER *takes the armchair facing the audience.* VINING *stands before the empty grate.* MILNER *goes over to window seat.*

VINING : Well, Cope, not done yet ? What sort of a fag do you call yourself ?

COPE : Please, Vining, may I leave the washing up till later ?

VINING : No, you may not. Why the devil should you ?

COPE : You see, Vining, it's gone five and I've got to report to Plunkett.

VINING : That's not my fault, you should have come in earlier.

COPE : I couldn't, Vining. . . . Simmy kept me and . . .

VINING : Who kept you ?

COPE : Simmy and . . .

VINING : Mr. Simmons to you, Cope ; don't be disrespectful to your housemaster.

COPE : I'm sorry, Vining, but he kept me. I couldn't help it. I'd got all my fractions wrong and . . .

VINING : Well, get ahead with it now and hurry. We want the place clear.

COPE : But Plunkett has got me down in Task Book.

AINGER : Oh, give the kid a chance, Vining, it's poor fun fagging anyway.

VINING : My son, if you will be a beastly little

slacker and get yourself put into Task Book it's no fault of ours.

COPE : But, Vining, I . . .

VINING : Shut up and get on with it. (*Pretends to hit him.*)

AINGER : Oh, leave the washing up, kid . . . shove the things into the cupboard out of the way and cut along. . . .

COPE : Thank you, Ainger.

VINING : And don't you think it would be a good idea if you were to wash yourself before coming in here to clear away ? You're bathed in ink.

COPE : I'm sorry, Vining, but Willis put the pumice-stone down my back.

MILNER : Why don't you use a fountain pen ?

COPE : I do, Milner. I got it for a shilling at Crawley's, only it leaks awfully and the nib's crossed.

VINING : I hope you were duly impressed with the head's awful words this morning in Assembly, Cope ? I trust you will profit by them and always keep yourself " pure in thought, word, and deed."

COPE : I didn't understand what he was talking about, Vining.

VINING : That's as it should be, Cope. I'm glad to see that you're still unspotted from the world.

COPE : What has Riley done ? (*Crosses with tea things.*)

VINING : Little boys mustn't ask questions.

MILNER : It's something you'll understand when you're older, Cope.

VINING : And perhaps if you are a good boy I'll tell you some day.

COPE : West said he knew but he wouldn't tell me. He told me to ask Simmons.

[*A loud guffaw from all three.*

VINING : That's right, Cope, you ask Simmons, or Mrs. Simmy . . . why don't you ask her . . . I'm sure she'd tell you.

AINGER : Shut up, Vining. . . . You cut along to Task Book, Cope, and tell Plunkett I kept you.

COPE (*interested*) : Won't you tell me what it was?

VINING : Another day, Cope. You come to me and I'll tell you.

AINGER : Chuck it, Vining. You'll know in time, Cope. Get along now.

VINING : And remember, Cope . . . "pure in thought, word, and deed."

[COPE *goes.*

AINGER : Leave the kid alone, Vining. He's still in the gooseberry bush stage. (*Rises, goes up and gets note paper and book. Sits and writes.*)

VINING : Time he came out of it then. Lord, I hope he asks Simmons.

MILNER : It would be a joke. I remember when I was a kid asking a master at my Prep. school how I was born. It was in the Physiology Class.

A lot of older chaps egged me on to it and I didn't know what I was doing. I was only about ten at the time and frightfully green.

VINING : What did the old boy do ?

MILNER : Oh, turned pink about the gills, stammered and gurgled and referred me to my mater.

VINING : And she . . . ?

MILNER : Oh, she trotted out the usual natural history poppy-cock. Lord, I'd like to see Simmy's face when Cope asks him.

VINING (*rises*) : What a damned fool game that pi-jaw was he gave us this afternoon. We, as Prefects, responsible for the moral tone of the house. Well, Ainger, you're house captain, will you organise the force for the protection of public morals ? Are you going to make me your A.D.C.? (*Salutes.*)

AINGER : If you were to take your position as Prefect a little more seriously, Vining, it wouldn't do you any harm.

VINING (*crosses to fireplace*) : Oh, listen to the bloke . . . getting all official. By the way, where's young Woodley ? What's he got to say about it all ? You know, I think that kid's still pretty innocent about most things ; altho' he pretends not to be.

AINGER : No, he's not innocent, he's only reticent.

VINING : Reticent be——

AINGER : Well, shy then.

VINING : Rot !

MILNER : You know, I don't quite get young Woodley. Look at the lurid poetry he's always writing. That thing that just got into the Mag. Struck me as pretty go-ahead for a pure Public School. How did it go . . . something about dark-eyed maidens, supple-limbed . . . supple-limbed ! Not half ! I don't see how you make him out to be innocent, Vining. I think he's a dark horse, myself.

VINING : Oh, that doesn't mean anything. He was probably thinking of an athletic aunt on the tennis court. (ROGER WOODLEY *comes in. He is a shy, fair boy of between seventeen and eighteen.*) Hello, young passion flower, we were just talking about you.

WOODLEY : Oh ?

AINGER : What's up ?

WOODLEY : Nothing. Simmy again, that's all.

AINGER : What's the trouble now ?

WOODLEY : I don't know. Trying to be funny, as usual. That man doesn't like me.

VINING : What, not like little Woodley ? Our baby Prefect ?

WOODLEY : Shut up.

VINING : Oh, you're mistaken, Woodley, he loves you. How can you doubt it ? After all he

was saying about purity too. If you're not his ideal of the pale, pink, pure young schoolboy with your infant Samuel face I'd like to know who is.

WOODLEY : Chuck it, Vining.

AINGER : What has Simmy been saying now ?

WOODLEY : Oh, disapproving of me generally. My writings again. That poem in the Mag. Unhealthy. Why do I waste my time scribbling when I ought to be garnering the precious hours of youth to cultivate my mind. That sort of thing.

VINING : Well, I don't see why he should kick up such a fuss about a poem that couldn't have taken you more than a quarter of an hour.

WOODLEY : Oh, so you think it only took me a quarter of an hour ?

VINING : Well, you'd have been a fool if you'd spent any more time on it. But it's all the same with Simmy. Interference all along the line. And now this purity campaign of his. Why, a little affair like this of Riley's is enough to start him off for a whole term.

WOODLEY : Simmy's purity campaign makes me sick. Not that I hold any brief for Riley, whatever he may have done . . . dirty little beast that he is.

VINING : Whatever he may have done ?

WOODLEY : Well, the head wasn't exactly explicit, was he, with all his biblical metaphors. I gather it was one of the housemaids in Plunketts.

VINING : Yes, the dark-haired one. Doesn't say much for Riley's taste. Still, beggars can't be choosers. Plunkett caught them in the pantry. *Flagrante delicto* . . . so to speak.

WOODLEY : How nice for Plunkett.

VINING (*rises*) : What rot it is sacking a man for that.

WOODLEY : I don't see it.

VINING : Hell, yes. Ruining a chap's whole life just for the sake of discipline.

MILNER : What do you mean ?

VINING : Why, his pater's on the Army Council. Deuce of a swell. Riley was going into cavalry. He can't go now. His whole career absolutely bust.

AINGER : Serves him right. It'll do the rest of the school good anyway.

VINING : What do they think we are . . . Celibate monks ? Good Lord, it's human nature, isn't it ? I was over in France last year ; met a lot of French fellows. Things are pretty different over there, I can tell you. Why, practically every boy has got his *petite amie* and the thing is recognised and generally known. If you try to stop it it only leads to something worse.

AINGER : Rot. We're not all like you, Vining.

VINING : 'Tisn't rot ; it's the same thing in girls' schools if there are any men about the place. I could tell you a few tales that would open your eyes. I wouldn't mind being boot boy in a girls' school for a bit . . . and as for those co-education places. My hat !

WOODLEY : I don't believe it.

VINING : Bilge ! Why not ? You can't get away from human nature. That's all Simmy's purity campaign means. Suppress your natural instincts. Huh, and Simmy is a nice one to talk anyway.

MILNER : What do you mean ? Simmy's married.

VINING : I know he is. Jolly pretty woman she is too. A damned sight too good for old Simmy. But he's only been married two years and I was here before that . . . so were you, Milner. What about that parlour-maid of theirs. Nice piece. I'll bet she could tell a thing or two. High jinks she and Simmy used to have, I'll warrant.

AINGER (*finishes letter*) : Oh, shut up, Vining. You make me sick.

VINING : What do you suppose they choose all the school servants so old and ugly for then ? Gor', look at them. You couldn't find a lot like that anywhere in a day's march.

WOODLEY : Oh, drop it, Vining, Ainger's quite right. You have got a filthy mind.

VINING : This is a bit of a sudden conversion for

you, isn't it, Ainger? I can remember some of the tales you've told.

AINGER : There's a damned sight too much of that sort of talk in the school and I'm going to drop on it all I can.

VINING : Well, you can leave me out of your prayer meetings if you don't mind. Here, Milner, who's that kid peeping in ? (*Crosses to window.*)

MILNER (*out of window*) : Here . . . you . . . what do you mean by it ? 'Strewth, it's Cope !

VINING (*up to door centre*) : Cope, is it ?

MILNER (*out of window*) : Cope !

COPE (*off*) : Yes, Milner.

MILNER : What are you doing there ?

COPE : Please, Milner . . .

VINING : Come inside . . . we want you.

MILNER : Cope, your presence is urgently desired. . . . Scrimshanking, the little tic. That's all you get for your leniency, Ainger.

WOODLEY : What's up ?

MILNER : Ainger let him off washing up because he said he was in T.B.

[*A knock on the door.*

VINING : Entray, Mossoo.

[COPE *comes in frightened.*

AINGER (*rises licking envelope*) : Well, young man, what have you got to say for yourself ? Why aren't you in T.B. ?

COPE : Please, Ainger, Ratty forgot to put my name down. It wasn't on the list when I got there.

MILNER : He never put you in at all.

COPE : Yes, Milner, he did. Honestly. He said he was going to because I hadn't prepared my Livy. Second hour this morning . . . you ask anyone in D. Latin. Honour bright, Milner.

MILNER : Then why didn't you come back and finish your washing up, you lazy little swob ? (*Kicks him.*)

VINING (*taking* COPE *by the ear*) : And what do you mean by looking in at the window ? Don't you know it's forbidden ? Wanted to hear what we were saying, eh ?

COPE : No, Vining, I . . .

VINING : Well, as you must have made all arrangements for detention this afternoon, it seems a pity to disappoint you. So you had better come to Prefects' Detention at five-thirty. See ?

COPE : But why, Vining ?

[AINGER *crosses to settee. Picks up motor paper. Drops letter on table. Back to fireplace.*

VINING : Why . . . because I tell you to. For not being in Task Book, for looking in at the window,

for arguing with me now, and for being a lazy little slacker. And now get on with the washing up till half-past, and if you break anything I'll slay you.

[COPE *tearfully goes to cupboard.*

MILNER : And for God's sake don't snivel.

WOODLEY : There's a box of peppermint creams on the second shelf. Second shelf, I said, you idiot.

[COPE *brings box of sweets.* VINING *gets velvet rag from under settee, polishes shoes.*

MILNER : Chuck me one, Woodley.

[WOODLEY *does so.* AINGER *reaches out and takes one.*

WOODLEY : Vining ?

VINING : Peppermints? Lord no. Beer-fume removers. That's all they are good for.

WOODLEY : Don't swank.

VINING (*to* COPE) : And what are you waiting for ?

COPE : Nothing, Vining. (COPE *goes.*)

MILNER : By the way, isn't it Sunday we've all got to tea with Simmy and his Missis ?

VINING : Hell, yes. I hate these bun worries. Sitting round a drawing-room doing balancing stunts and making polite conversation, with Simmy being sarcastic about nothing and airing his Oxford memories.

AINGER : I believe Mrs. Simmy hates them as much as we do. Do you know, I'm sorry for that woman. She's awfully shy.

WOODLEY : Being married to Simmy can be no joke. I like Mrs. Simmy.

VINING : Besides, it messes one's afternoon up so.

WOODLEY : What the hell is there to do on a Sunday afternoon anyway ?

VINING : I don't know, Woodley, whether your admiration for Mrs. Simmy has prevented you from noticing the blandishments of the young woman in Crawley's.

WOODLEY : Which one ?

AINGER : Do you mean the red-haired one who always tries to fumble with your hand when she is giving you the change ?

WOODLEY : What ! Does she do that to you too ?

VINING : Oh, my precious, did you think you were the only one ?

WOODLEY : Well, what about her anyway ?

VINING : Oh, nothing . . . only she's not averse to taking long walks on Sunday afternoons in the neighbourhood of Mallow Woods.

WOODLEY : But Mallow Woods are out of bounds.

VINING : Exactly, my innocent . . . less likelihood of being found out.

WOODLEY : What . . . what do you mean ?

VINING : Oh, come now . . . you don't want me to be coarse, do you ?

WOODLEY : You mean . . . you . . .

VINING : Exactly. And she has got a friend . . . works in Cowle's the drapers. Nice girl . . . dark-eyed . . . supple-limbed. I'll introduce you if you like.

WOODLEY : I don't think so, thanks. (*Goes up to settee for history book.*)

VINING : Just as you like, of course.

AINGER : If I took you seriously, Vining . . .

VINING : You would report me to Simmy as victim number one of the purity campaign. Go ahead, then. . . . Here, I must go, I've got a hell of a lot of extra maths to get up. Think it over, Woodley. Any Sunday afternoon when there is nobody about. (*Goes.*)

[WOODLEY *goes to table.*

MILNER (*rising*) : Old Vining knows a thing or two.

AINGER : I dare say. But it's nine-tenths bluff and swank.

MILNER : I don't know so much. He's pretty hot stuff. His pater's rich, you know. Vining's tinned meats. Lets him do as he likes. Gives him a latch-key and no questions asked. I wish mine did. Well, I'm going to change for Nets. Coming, Woodley ?

WOODLEY : Not to-night. I'm swatting George III for Ratty.

MILNER : Ainger ?

AINGER : No, I'm taking P.D. at half-past.

MILNER : Cheerio, then. (*Goes.*)

WOODLEY : I hate Vining.

AINGER : I know you do.

WOODLEY : Don't you ?

AINGER : Hate ? No, he's a type.

WOODLEY : A foul type. I say, Ainger, how much is there in it ?

AINGER : In what ?

WOODLEY : All his talk.

AINGER : More than I pretend to believe, I think.

WOODLEY : These shop girls . . . does he . . . really ?

AINGER : I believe so.

WOODLEY : Why don't you do something ?

AINGER : How can I ? Tell tales to Simmy ? You know I can't. Before he got made a prefect it was different, but he was damned careful then. The best I can do now is to pretend not to believe it.

WOODLEY : But you do all the same ?

AINGER : I'm afraid so.

WOODLEY : But you don't approve of it? (*Opens books.*)

AINGER : No, I damn well don't. All the same there is something in what he says.

WOODLEY (*drops book*) : How d'you mean?

AINGER : Well, we are under a system here that treats us as not being mature until we leave, that is when we are eighteen or nineteen—nature matures us at fourteen. What about it?

WOODLEY : But you don't mean that every one . . . ?

AINGER : Not everyone, no. It works different ways. But precious few of us escape it altogether —one way or another.

WOODLEY (*walking over to window*) : Well, I think it's beastly. Ainger, have you ever . . . ?

AINGER : What?

WOODLEY (*back to him*) : You've kissed girls?

AINGER : Of course.

WOODLEY : Have you ever been in love? Properly, I mean?

AINGER : Never.

WOODLEY : You don't believe in it?

AINGER : I never said so.

WOODLEY : Vining doesn't. He couldn't or he wouldn't go on as he does.

AINGER : The two things aren't the same, you know.

WOODLEY (*on window seat*) : I wish I could get them straightened out.

AINGER : What's the matter? (*No answer.*) Can't you tell me?

WOODLEY (*turning to him*) : Oh, it's all such a beastly mix-up.

AINGER : What is it? Are you in love? Is that it?

WOODLEY : No. No, of course it's not that. Only I suppose I am different from other fellows, that's all.

AINGER : What do you mean?

WOODLEY : You won't laugh at me?

AINGER : What do you take me for?

[WOODLEY *comes back to his perch on the table. Fiddles with the box of sweets, not looking at* AINGER.

WOODLEY : Well, one night in town last holidays I met Herpath . . . you remember, left last year? (AINGER *nods.*) He was at a loose end and he asked me to go and have dinner with him . . . up West somewhere . . . so I did . . . and then he took me to a place down Tottenham Court Road. A dancing place, the "Siren" it was called. I don't know, I thought it was awful, but he seemed to like it. There were a whole lot of beastly looking men, awful swine, and . . . and . . . I hung about until, well . . . there were a lot of women there . . . you know, professionals, the real thing, and I felt such a

damned fool sitting there doing nothing, and Herpath was dancing, so I asked one of them to dance. . . .

AINGER : Well ?

WOODLEY : It was awful. I didn't know what to say to her and she made me feel sick. You know, painted up to the eyes and awful cheap scent, and I felt quite . . . well . . . you know, almost frightened. And then we sat down and she drank whiskey and laughed at me, and I just couldn't talk to her. I couldn't think of anything to say. And I danced with another one, too. She looked quite old, and she smelt of drink. I suppose I could have gone home with her if I'd liked. I believe Herpath did with one of them . . . anyway I lost him.

AINGER : And did you ?

WOODLEY : No. . . . I tell you I felt frightened. Well, it's damned silly, isn't it ? I mean the way I've talked about these things, the way Vining does, and told smutty jokes and all that, and then, when it comes to the point, funking it like that.

AINGER : I shouldn't worry if I were you.

WOODLEY : And then there was a girl I met at home at a dance last year. Awfully pretty, you know . . . fair hair and dressed in pink. I danced with her twice and we were sitting out together, and I wanted to kiss her frightfully : but I simply hadn't got the pluck. I didn't know how to go

about it. I felt I couldn't just catch hold of her and kiss her like that straight off the reel. I just sat there, saying nothing, like a damned fool, till the next dance began. I could have kicked myself afterwards. I never saw her again. Bloody silly, isn't it? Then I go writing poetry that Vining and his sort make fun of where I imagine myself no end of a dog. At least, no, I don't mean that, but . . .

AINGER : I know.

WOODLEY : Well, why am I different from other people then?

AINGER : Do you want to be like Vining?

WOODLEY : Vining, no . . . but . . .

AINGER : I shouldn't say you were different from most people. I've felt like that too.

WOODLEY : You?

AINGER : Yes, often. It is nothing to worry about.

WOODLEY : What a mix-up it all is. (*Crosses to window.*)

AINGER : Don't worry. Take things as they come. How old are you, seventeen?

WOODLEY : Nearly eighteen.

AINGER : Well, you needn't say it as if you were eighty. You've plenty of time. We're most of us like that at first, unless we are Vining's sort.

WOODLEY : Yes, but what I feel is, all this sort of thing . . . shop-girls and housemaids . . . I simply couldn't do it. It would make me feel

sick. And then you meet someone, someone you like : someone of your own class. . . . I don't want to be snobbish, but you know what I mean . . . someone you could be really keen on : and the thing's impossible. You can't think of them that way, at least I can't. I can't imagine them letting me. It's all wrong somehow. I suppose, when people are really in love . . . I don't know, I don't understand that either. I don't see how it all squares out. (*Has been moving about. Flops on window seat.*)

AINGER (*crosses to him, puts hand on shoulder*) : It's a brute, isn't it? I'm afraid I can't help you much. Things pan out more or less in the long run. One makes a few mistakes and does a few things one's sorry for. For the rest it's just a question of running straight as best you can. You don't want to get morbid about it any more than you want to wallow in it ; but there is such a thing as a happy medium. (*Crosses R., sits in chair.*) As for "love," I believe a lot of it is imagination ; or that it is something that is kept for a special favoured few. You think about it because you've read about it and seen it in plays and on the pictures. You're brought up on it. Your first fairy stories end with people marrying and living happily ever after. You come up against it in everything you read, and you imagine yourself doing the same thing. I wonder how many people ever strike it without being disappointed.

WOODLEY : I dare say you're right.

AINGER : I remember getting religion fearfully

badly when I was about fifteen, wanted to go into the Church and everything . . . had it properly. And then it faded away and I can see now that there never was anything in it at all. I shouldn't be surprised if love isn't something like that.

WOODLEY : In the same way I've " got " poetry now.

AINGER : I'm sorry to be such a wet blanket about it.

WOODLEY : I expect you are right really. Though I can't believe it.

AINGER : How do you mean ?

WOODLEY : Well, I can sort of see myself falling in love, only I suppose I'd be too shy when it came to the point.

AINGER : Well, there's lots of time. Besides, we are not all made the same way. I'm not romantic, that's all.

WOODLEY : You've been awfully decent, letting me talk like this, I'm no end grateful.

AINGER : Rot.

WOODLEY : 'Tisn't rot, I mean it. I don't know why you put up with it.

AINGER : I happen to be rather fond of you, that's why. (*Knock.*) Come in.

WOODLEY : Oh, who the hell is that ?

AINGER : Come in, I tell you. (*Still no answer. He goes to door. Opens it quickly. Laura Simmons is standing outside.*) Oh, Mrs. Simmons, I had no

idea it was you. Please excuse me for shouting like that.

LAURA : It's quite all right.

AINGER : Do come in.

LAURA : Thank you. (*She comes in and crosses to chair by fire. She is a very pretty woman of twenty-eight, rather fragile, shy and retiring. She has a sweet voice and a slight air of mystery about her.*)

AINGER : Won't you sit down ?

LAURA : Thanks. Good afternoon. (*This to* WOODLEY.)

WOODLEY : Good afternoon.

AINGER : Can I do something for you ?

LAURA : Please. It is very irregular of me, I know, coming here like this. I wanted to see you, and I happened to be walking past. It seemed so silly sending a formal note asking you to call.

AINGER : Of course. What is it ?

LAURA : It is the shrubbery. The boys are using it as a short cut to the road ; the lower school, I think. It is not that I object to that ; but they are treating it so badly, and simply ruining the beds at the end. I am rather fond of my flowers. I wonder if you could do anything. I did not want to bother my husband.

AINGER : Of course.

LAURA : I thought perhaps a word from you as captain . . . I don't want to make a serious house-master's matter of it.

AINGER : Of course, I'll see it's stopped at once.

LAURA : Thank you so much.

AINGER : You've not been in the Prefects' room before, I think, Mrs. Simmons. Do you like it ?

LAURA : I've been here in the holidays when it's all bare and tidy. (*Looking round at the litter.*) It looks much more human now.

WOODLEY : I'm afraid it's in an awful mess.

LAURA : I hardly know the school buildings in term time. I'm afraid they frighten me a little. I feel terribly out of it all, with all the bustle and high spirits.

AINGER : You should be used to it by now.

LAURA : Yes, perhaps.

WOODLEY : We never see you at house-matches or anything.

LAURA : I know. It's terribly remiss of me, I know. But I think I'm rather shy. My husband is always telling me of it.

WOODLEY : Oh, I didn't mean that. Please, it wasn't a reproach. Only . . .

LAURA : Only what ?

WOODLEY : Well, only . . . a regret.

LAURA : Thank you. But I'm disturbing you.

WOODLEY : Not a bit, really. I am afraid I have nothing to offer you, except peppermint creams. Will you have one ? (*Offers box.*)

LAURA : Thank you. (*Takes one. A knock at the door.* LAURA *starts.*)

AINGER : Who's there ?

[*The door opens and* COPE *appears with tray of crockery ; looking very woebegone.*

I had forgotten about you.

COPE : Yes, and please, Ainger . . .

AINGER : What ?

COPE : I am afraid I have broken the teapot.

[*There is a long silence.* LAURA'S *presence is a constraint. She looks down at her lap. Then across at* WOODLEY. *She catches his eye and then smiles.*

AINGER : Oh, well, shove the things into the cupboard and cut now. I'll see you later, after P.D. By the way, you're in already, aren't you ?

COPE : Yes, Ainger.

AINGER : Well, I'm taking it. See me after.

[COPE *goes.*

LAURA : Poor kid. What will you do to him for that. Thrash him ?

AINGER : I suppose so.

LAURA : It seems a pity. But I suppose there is nothing else. Couldn't you stop his pocket money ?

AINGER : I think he'd rather be thrashed.

LAURA : By the way, I feel terribly ignorant, but what is P.D. ?

AINGER : Prefects' Detention. And I'm afraid I must be going to take it now.

LAURA : What do you make them do ?

AINGER : Learn poetry by heart.

LAURA : What a terrible punishment.

AINGER : It is for most of them, I assure you.

LAURA : I thought you made them write lines.

AINGER : Mr. Simmons forbade it. He says it spoils the handwriting. The poetry is his idea. It is a tradition of the house. I really must go. Good-bye.

LAURA : Good-bye. You are all coming to tea on Sunday, aren't you ?

AINGER : Thanks, yes. We are looking forward to it.

LAURA : Are you ? I imagined you hated it.

AINGER : What ?

LAURA : I must not keep you. Good-bye. (AINGER *goes.*) If writing lines spoils the handwriting, doesn't learning poetry as a punishment kill your affection for verse ?

WOODLEY : Most people haven't any to kill, Mrs. Simmons.

LAURA : I daresay that's true. Well, doesn't it prevent your ever developing one ?

WOODLEY : Yes, I expect it does. I shall never

know whether Gray's " Elegy " is a good poem. It always brings back P.D. to me. I can't separate it.

LAURA : And now you're a prefect you inflict it on others ?

WOODLEY : I have to.

LAURA : Anyway it didn't kill your love for poetry.

WOODLEY : How do you know that ?

LAURA : The school magazine. I read your verses, I liked them. I've wanted to tell you.

WOODLEY : Did you ? I am awfully glad. Nobody much else did. I think the Editor only took them to fill up a corner. Poetry does, you know. He made me cut one verse because he hadn't room for it.

LAURA : Do you write much ?

WOODLEY : A fair bit . . . odd times.

LAURA : Perhaps you might let me see some others one day ?

WOODLEY : Rather, if you'd like to. They are pretty rotten, though.

LAURA : Why do you say that ? You don't mean it, you can't, or you wouldn't write them. You don't really think they are bad, do you ?

WOODLEY : No, I suppose I don't.

LAURA : And you'll let me see them ?

WOODLEY : Of course . . . that is . . .

LAURA : What ? I won't show them to my husband, if that's what you're afraid of. I promise. But I'd like to see them.

WOODLEY : I've got them here if you'd care to take them now.

[WOODLEY *goes to cupboard, takes out an attaché case and unlocks it at table.*

LAURA : Thanks, I would. You keep them locked up ?

WOODLEY : Yes.

LAURA : Because they are such treasures, or for fear of prying eyes ?

WOODLEY : Well, I don't want everyone to read them . . . all.

LAURA : Do they tease you . . . rag you, I should say, shouldn't I . . . for writing poetry ?

WOODLEY : They do a bit. I don't mind. Here they are. (*He hands her a sheaf of MS. and returns case to cupboard.*)

LAURA : Thank you, I'll take great care of them. You share a study with Ainger, don't you ?

WOODLEY : Yes.

LAURA : Are you great friends ?

WOODLEY : Yes, I think so. Ainger's a splendid fellow. I like him awfully.

LAURA : Don't you ever want to be alone ? Here with this room and sharing a study and a dormitory, don't you ever feel you want to get away from the others, however much you like them ? I should.

WOODLEY : Yes, I do sometimes.

LAURA : But you like school. Or don't you ?

WOODLEY : Yes, I like it awfully. I hated it at first.

LAURA : Were you bullied ?

WOODLEY : Yes, a bit, and some of the masters were sarcastic and horrid because they saw I was homesick.

LAURA : Who ? No, I oughtn't to ask that. I always feel awfully sorry for the new boys. I want to mother them, and be kind to them.

WOODLEY : I'm sure they wish you would !

[LAURA, *embarrassed, goes to pictures around room.*

LAURA : Are you in any of these ?

WOODLEY : Yes, here, this was last year's group.

LAURA : Oh, yes, what a baby you look there. Why do you blush . . . you were almost a baby, then ?

WOODLEY : I was nearly seventeen.

LAURA : But it seems a long time ago, doesn't it ? Don't you feel a terribly different person now ? Much more grown up ? More than a year ?

WOODLEY : I feel an awful baby still.

LAURA : Who's this boy next to you ? I know his face, don't I ?

WOODLEY : Herpath. He left last year.

LAURA : Oh, yes, I remember. A horrid boy Oh, a horrid boy.

[WOODLEY *starts*.

Oh, I'm sorry. Was he a friend of yours ?

WOODLEY : No, never a friend. I never liked him much.

LAURA : You're keen on games, aren't you ? And you run, too.

WOODLEY : Yes, a bit.

LAURA : I remember last year's sports. That was one school function that I did attend. I was awfully shy about going. But I enjoyed it.

WOODLEY : Shy ? You ?

LAURA : Yes, why not ? I'm terribly shy.

WOODLEY : So am I.

LAURA : I know. (*Picks up book from table.*) What's this ? Swinburne ? Yours ?

WOODLEY : Yes.

LAURA : You like Swinburne ?

WOODLEY : Yes, awfully.

LAURA (*opens book and reads softly aloud*) :
" Eyes coloured like a water-flower,
And deeper than the green sea's glass ;
Eyes that remember one sweet hour—
In vain we swore it should not pass ;
In vain, alas ! "

WOODLEY : How beautifully you read it.

LAURA: It is rather beautiful, isn't it? (*She puts book down.*) But there are better than Swinburne. Have you discovered Shelley yet?

WOODLEY: Yes. (*He begins to recite.*)
"Swiftly walk o'er the western wave,
Spirit of night . . ."

LAURA (*joining gently*):
"Blind with thine hair the eyes of day,
Kiss her until she be wearied out,
Then wander o'er city and sea and land,
Touching all with thine opiate wand.
Come, long sought."

WOODLEY: It's wonderful.

LAURA: Yes.

[*The door opens and* SIMMONS *comes in. He is a tall, lean, dried up man of nearly fifty.*

SIMMONS: Oh, you here, Laura? I came to look for Ainger.

LAURA: So did I. I wanted to speak to him. He went out about five minutes ago.

WOODLEY: He's taking P.D., sir.

SIMMONS: I hope he enjoys it; you might tell him to see me after Chapel.

WOODLEY: Yes, sir.

SIMMONS: It isn't often that you condescend to visit the school, Laura.

LAURA: No, I know.

SIMMONS : And has our young friend, Woodley, here, been entertaining you ?

LAURA : Yes, very pleasantly.

SIMMONS : Woodley is our Poet Laureate, you know, only he writes a good deal more than most Laureates. A dreamer. Native woodnotes wild and all that. An infant Shelley, eh, Woodley ?

WOODLEY : Am I ?

SIMMONS : Why this sudden modesty when you flaunt your rhapsodies before the world? Of course you are. We take ourselves very seriously, eyes in fine frenzy rolling . . . wear our hair long, don't we ?

LAURA : Frank, we must be going. It's later than I thought.

SIMMONS : Perhaps you read his effusion in the school magazine? I—er—forget the title. What was it, Woodley ?

LAURA : I remember. Reverie. I liked it.

SIMMONS : " Reverie " ? Oh, yes. A dreamer as I said. Dark-eyed maidens and romantic moons, or something equally affecting, wasn't it ? I trust it was generally appreciated, Woodley. But, then, poets never are, are they ? They thrive on disregard. Always spurned and misunderstood in their lifetime. Well, perhaps you'll have the laugh on us when you're dead, and they will set your verses to be learned by heart in P.D., if that is any consolation to you. You're looking forward

to dying young, I presume. (*He picks up book.*) What's this. Swinburne, eh? You admire Swinburne, I suppose?

WOODLEY: Yes, sir.

SIMMONS: Nauseous stuff, but they all do at your age. It's a form of intellectual measles, but you will grow out of it.

LAURA: Frank, I must go.

SIMMONS: I'm coming. All the same a little more time on the Binomial Theorem wouldn't exactly do you any harm, Woodley. Not quite so enthralling as Mr. Swinburne's lilies and languors, perhaps, but a good deal healthier, I can assure you. You'll tell Ainger I want to see him?

LAURA (*takes* WOODLEY'S *MS. from chair*): Oh, I'm forgetting these.

SIMMONS: What have you got there?

LAURA: Only some recipes Mrs. Ratcliffe lent me. Good-bye.

[*She goes, with* SIMMONS. WOODLEY *stays where he is, thinking. Picks up Swinburne, opens and gently reads aloud.*

WOODLEY: "Eyes coloured like a water-flower
And deeper than the green sea's glass . . ."

[*Shuts book, shakes himself, and opens history. His mind wanders. Finally he slams the history together and hurls it into a corner.*

Oh, damn George Three and all his bleeding Cabinet !

[VINING *comes in, cheerily singing the latest musical comedy tune.*

VINING : Hello, all alone ? Mrs. Simmy's been in here, hasn't she ? Have I missed her ?

WOODLEY : Yes.

VINING : Too bad. We don't exactly get a surfeit of female society. What did she want ?

WOODLEY : Oh, nothing. To speak to Ainger about the kids in her back garden or something.

VINING : H'm. Funny her coming in here. Pretty little thing though. Hot stuff too, I should think. That quiet dark kind always are. Old Simmy's a lucky fellow. He knows what's what all right, and I expect he makes the most of it too. That's the secret of the popularity of marriage, you know. I hope she likes it, that's all. Can't say I should care about being mauled by Simmy if I was a girl. Has she got a crush on Ainger, do you think, coming in here after him like that ? Ainger's a good looking chap ; bit of a change, after Simmy. Did you retire tactfully and leave them alone ?

[WOODLEY *suddenly gets up and leaves the room, slamming the door behind him.*

Here, what's up ? Now . . . what the . . .

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE : *Laura's Drawing-room.*

TIME : *Three weeks later. About four in the afternoon.*

A pretty room with French windows leading on to a garden. A door in the back of the wall R. and another in the centre of the L. wall. Fireplace in C. of R. wall. At right angles to it a long low chesterfield, L. of which is a small armchair, facing the fire. Below the door left a writing-table R.C. The room is prettily furnished with pleasant cretonnes.

When the curtain rises, SIMMONS *is sitting at the desk L., correcting exercises.* LAURA *is curled up in the corner of the chesterfield.* SIMMONS *smokes a pipe.*

SIMMONS (*working*) : Oh, dear ! Fool ! Ah, I thought that would catch him. There, done. (*He rises.*)

LAURA : Bad papers, Frank ?

SIMMONS : No worse than usual, I suppose. I have long ceased to expect brilliance, but I do at least hope for intelligence. Vainly, nine times out of ten. They learn the stuff parrot-wise. They never make the slightest attempt to understand it. You have only to set a question in ever so slightly unfamiliar a form, and it catches them at once.

LAURA : I sometimes wonder if men become schoolmasters for the joy of catching boys in exam-papers.

SIMMONS : They well might if it gives them any

pleasure ; but it is one that soon palls, I assure you. By the way, I have only just noticed the date. Isn't it your birthday, Laura ?

LAURA : Yes, it is.

SIMMONS : My congratulations.

LAURA : Thank you.

SIMMONS : Many happy returns of the day. (*He kisses her rather perfunctorily.*) You are not hurt at my having forgotten it, are you ?

LAURA : No, I think I'd rather forget it myself.

SIMMONS : Why do you say that ? Is anything the matter ?

LAURA : Nothing curable, anyway. (*She lights cigarette.*)

SIMMONS : Laura, you are smoking far more than you used to these days, aren't you ?

LAURA : Yes, it gives me something to do.

SIMMONS : It doesn't look well.

LAURA : Do you mean it doesn't suit me ?

SIMMONS : Oh, don't be facetious. I mean, I don't like to see it. It sets a bad example.

LAURA : I don't do it outside, I invariably refuse cigarettes at tea with the wives, much as I long for them, for your sake, Frank. I know they all think I am scandalously young to be a housemaster's wife. I must take the first opportunity of telling Mrs. Ratcliffe that I found a grey hair this morning.

SIMMONS : There is a bad spirit about the place these days.

LAURA : And do you think my smoking fosters it ? What do you mean by a bad spirit ? Lack of enthusiasm for Algebra ?

SIMMONS : Oh, one can't talk seriously to you.

LAURA : I'm sorry. What is it, Frank ? Tell me. You've not been looking well lately. You're worried about something. What's the matter ?

SIMMONS : I suppose you have heard about this business of Riley ?

LAURA : The boy who was expelled ? Yes. Mrs. Plunkett was telling me at tea last week, as one married woman to another, with many unnecessary details, I thought. You didn't tell me anything about it.

SIMMONS : Well, it is scarcely a matter I should care to discuss with you. I imagined that you would hear about it from some of the ladies.

LAURA : What about it ?

SIMMONS : It has left a very bad impression. There is too much of that sort of thing in the school. There is a spirit of unrest pervading the place. Never in all the twenty-five years that I have been here have I known it like this.

LAURA : I don't understand. What's wrong ?

SIMMONS : It's difficult to explain. I can't put my finger on it ; but it is the general tone. Sex. That is what it comes down to ; a sort of unhealthy brooding. This affair of Riley's is only an instance, a flagrant one, I admit; but it is all of a piece.

LAURA: Surely you're exaggerating? Imagining.

SIMMONS : I wish I were. You don't see it, sitting

here as you do and meeting them only when they are on their best behaviour. But there is no respect. I've been noticing it growing, more and more so since this business of Riley. I spoke to the Prefects, very seriously. But I can get nothing from them. No help, no cohesion. I am not at all sure that they are not responsible for a lot of the trouble. I never approved of the Prefect System. Their manner lately has been most offensive. All of them, and young Woodley in particular. There is a surliness and cynicism about that boy, a sort of superiority. It is all this intellectual flapdoodle. He imagines himself too good for everyone. This rubbish about writing poetry. It is not healthy or normal in a boy. It all comes down to the same thing in the end. Sex. It is at the bottom of all the trouble. The school is going through a bad period; these things come in waves. A few of the wrong men at the top and the harm is done.

LAURA: Oh, surely, Frank . . . I don't know much about boys, and you should, but it seems scarcely possible to me. One or two cases, yes, I understand that, abnormal or vicious types. . . .

SIMMONS: It goes deeper than that. You don't realise. Because a boy has a pretty baby face you think he is all innocence and guilelessness. If you had spent your life as I have, you would know what sinks of impurity their minds can be.

LAURA: Isn't it the system? I have no brothers, but I have watched since I have been here, and it seems to me that it is a great mistake to cut boys off like that, from their homes, from

women, just at the age when they are most sensitive, most curious. It is an impressionable age, and I can't help feeling that perhaps they need a little sympathy and understanding, that they can't get from men and from each other.

SIMMONS : I know that argument. You get it in the novels that young men write as soon as they are let out into the world. They want to turn a Public School into a sort of Zenana.

LAURA : And what's your remedy ?

SIMMONS : Discipline and a healthy observance of games and a proper inculcation of the Public School spirit. There is no *esprit de corps*, no decent feeling. . . .

LAURA : Frank, can't we get away from here ?

SIMMONS : Get away ? Why ?

LAURA : Oh, I don't know. It is on top of me. All of it—everything. The other masters, their wives, the selfishness, the littleness, the lack of understanding. These boys, they are transparent, as clear as crystal, and you see them distorted, twisted. You have no feeling for them, save for their respect for you, their conforming to a few stupid forms and ceremonies. You don't think of them as young developing beings, just coming out into the world, wondering terribly what it is all going to be like. Excited, eager, rough and blundering, if you like ; but honest, decent, happy, amongst themselves, left to themselves.

SIMMONS : Well, really, this is amazing. You, of all people, to talk like that. You, who never go

near a school function, who stammer and can't make conversation when I ask the House Prefects to tea. What do you know of them? What can you know of them?

LAURA: No, I know. I was imagining, that's all.

SIMMONS: Precisely; romancing, sentimentalising, as usual, instead of facing the problem. As to leaving here, you know my feelings on that point. If I could get a headship I would leave like a shot. You know I have tried. It is no fault of mine.

LAURA: I know. Besides, it would be the same elsewhere, or worse. I'm afraid I am not fitted to be a schoolmaster's wife. Tell me, that young master, Campbell. He seems to get on well with the boys. To be friendly with them, and play games with them. What has he to say about this?

SIMMONS: In heaven's name, why drag in Campbell? I don't at all approve of that young man. He is far too free and easy with the boys. That sort of thing destroys respect.

LAURA: I thought he was very popular.

SIMMONS: Popular! Oh, I dare say. Anyone can be popular if he will stoop to play down to it. Education is a science, and any fool thinks he can play at it these days.

LAURA: Yes.

SIMMONS: It needs experience and a firm hand. This spirit that is about has got to be stamped out, at all costs. Well, I am going down to watch the cricket. I suppose it is no use asking you to come?

LAURA : I don't think so.

SIMMONS : You should come, Laura. If not for your own sake, then for mine. It looks bad, your staying away from everything as you do, as if you took no interest. I get no help, even from you. Out of respect for me you might come. A match like to-day's . . .

LAURA : Well, I can't come to-day. I have invited Ainger and Woodley to tea.

SIMMONS : You have ? You never told me.

LAURA : I forgot.

SIMMONS : When did you ask them ?

LAURA : Yesterday. I met Woodley in the lane.

SIMMONS : What time ? What was he doing there ?

LAURA : About five o'clock. I have no idea what he was doing. I think he'd been for a walk.

SIMMONS : He ought to have been at the nets. Slackness again. That young man is going the wrong way. What made you ask them to tea ?

LAURA : I thought I would like to. They are nice boys, both of them, and they are friends.

SIMMONS : Well, I wish you wouldn't. That's my province. I don't want the boys in and out of this side of the house at all hours like that. You might use a little discretion. Still, I suppose, as you have asked them . . . Anyway, I am not going to stay away from the match for that. They ought to be watching. You might have known that.

LAURA : I didn't think. Anyway they never said so.

SIMMONS : Of course not. Any excuse to shirk their duty to the school. Even if it is only coming here to be bored by tea.

LAURA : Why should they be bored ?

SIMMONS : Why ? Great Heavens ! Is there anything more depressing and boring in this world than a drawing-room tea-party ?

LAURA : Why do you ask them then, as you do, on Sundays ?

SIMMONS : Because it's expected of me. But you can't pretend it's enjoyable.

LAURA : And why not ? Whose fault is that ? Yours ! Because you are not human. Because you can never get away from the schoolmaster, never forget your position and your dignity, and that you are talking down to them. Isn't it possible for master and boy to meet and talk on a level ; like normal human beings ?

SIMMONS : Not without immediately destroying that relation and all its respect.

LAURA : I don't believe it.

SIMMONS : You mentioned Campbell just now. Well, take him as a case in point. Watch him with the boys. Could you tell by looking at them which was master and which was boy ?

LAURA : And that seems to me to be the essence of a good schoolmaster. There are times, Frank, when I can't recognise you, when I can't see the man in you for the schoolmaster, when I look helplessly for the man I married.

SIMMONS : Are you hurt because I suggested that

Ainger and Woodley would be bored by coming to tea with you?

LAURA: I am not a child, Frank.

SIMMONS: You are being extremely childish and absurd.

LAURA: Oh, very well. Frank, why can't you behave normally and unaffectedly towards them? Why carry the class-room attitude into your ordinary existence? Even in the holidays I have noticed it. Among other people; that domineering, self-conscious attitude of the pedagogue that hangs around you like a halo.

SIMMONS: Well, when you have quite done pulling me to pieces will you tell me what all this means?

LAURA: Oh, it is useless for me to talk, I know. But it seems to me so wrong, so unnecessarily wrong, that there should be such a barrier between you. A little common humanity is all that is needed. . . .

SIMMONS: Are you proposing to play Blind Man's Buff with them, or Postman's Knock?

LAURA: I am sorry. I was a fool to talk to you, to expect you to understand. God, if I had known it would be like this . . .

SIMMONS: What then?

LAURA: I would never have come here. Never have married you. You only married me because you wanted someone to play the staff-lady, because a housemaster is expected to be a married man and his wife to enhance his petty little dignity.

SIMMONS : Now you are merely getting hysterical and foolish. If you feel like that about it, why did you marry me ?

LAURA : Because I had not seen you at it.

SIMMONS : At it ? . . . What do you mean ?

LAURA : Mean ? All that I have been talking about for the last half-hour. Because I thought you were a man and not a mass of prejudice. Oh, for God's sake leave me alone.

SIMMONS : Well, good-bye.

LAURA : Good-bye.

[SIMMONS *goes out of window.* LAURA *presses her face against her hands. Goes to window and back to seat.* MAID *enters.*

MAID : Mr. Woodley.

[WOODLEY *enters.*

LAURA (*shaking hands*) : Good afternoon. Will you bring tea, Maud ? Mr. Simmons won't be in.

[MAID *goes.*

Didn't you bring Ainger with you ?

WOODLEY : He couldn't come. He is awfully sorry. He sent a note. I've got it here. (*Feels in his pockets.*) He had to play in the match at the last minute. Townley has sprained his ankle. (*He finds letter.*) Here you are.

LAURA : Thanks. Wouldn't you rather be watching the match since your friend is playing ?

WOODLEY : No. I can see him play any time. Has your—Mr. Simmons gone to watch ?

LAURA : Yes, my—Mr. Simmons has. I ought

to have thought of the match when I asked you yesterday. Why didn't you tell me?

WOODLEY: Oh, I . . . I . . . thought . . .

LAURA: You guessed that I shouldn't be at the match, I suppose.

WOODLEY: Why do you never come, Mrs. Simmons?

LAURA: I've told you before. Because I am shy. Besides I would hate to come and play the schoolmaster's wife and be stared at and wished out of the way. If I came I should like to come just simply and freely as you do.

WOODLEY: Why don't you come then? Besides, it wouldn't be like that a bit. You are not like the other masters' wives.

LAURA: Thank you!

WOODLEY: I didn't mean . . . anyway, you are not.

[MAID *comes in with tea on a tray. She puts it on round table which she brings in front of* LAURA, *and goes.*

LAURA: Sugar and milk, isn't it? Help yourself to things, please.

WOODLEY (*passing plate*): Won't you?

LAURA (*taking sandwich*): Thanks. (*Hands him tea.*) I must give you back your poems before you go. I told you yesterday that I liked them, didn't I?

WOODLEY: Yes. I'm awfully glad.

LAURA: How old are you . . . eighteen?

WOODLEY: Nearly.

LAURA : You are awfully experimental, if you know what I mean. You write as if you were trying to find out something. All poets do, of course. All good poets. The bad ones think they know already.

WOODLEY : Well, I suppose I am.

LAURA : What, exactly ? Do you know ?

WOODLEY : Just what everything is about. What it is all for. I don't think they are very good, really. You see, I get hold of something, an idea. I imagine it, because I haven't had much experience, really. One doesn't at school. And then it may be all different. Sometimes I feel I know an awful lot about life, and then something happens and all my plans get upset, and it isn't anything like I imagined it.

LAURA : The best ones are the ones when you are writing about things you know. About the country, and friendship.

WOODLEY : You mean the others are rubbish ? The ones I like best, probably.

LAURA : Which ones are those ?

WOODLEY : Well, there was one called " Love Song." I don't know whether you remember it.

LAURA : Yes. I didn't care for it as much as the others.

WOODLEY : Of course I was awfully young when I wrote it. There was one I wrote last night. Like that, only better, I think. I've got it here if you would care to read it.

LAURA : Please, won't you read it to me ?

WOODLEY : Yes, if . . . if . . . you would rather.

LAURA : Do.

WOODLEY (*pulls paper from pocket*) : It is a sonnet.

LAURA : Yes.

WOODLEY (*reads*) :

I think your face was Helen's. For your sake
The Trojan ruins flame. In anguish dumb
The dying Tristram stares with eyes that ache,
Across the lonely waves, to see you come,
Enslaved by your first kiss. And Romeo
Steals through the moonlight garden silently
To find that subtle smile that well I know,
And you are standing on the balcony.

Oh, lovers all throughout the world have known
Your shadowed beauty, and when poets say
Their love was such, I think I know the way
You held their reason captive. You alone
Have swayed all men through time, in every land.
He loved, and she was fair. I understand.

[WOODLEY *puts paper back in pocket. A silence.*

LAURA : Woodley—by the way, your name is Roger, isn't it ? Do you mind if I call you by it ?

WOODLEY : Please, please do.

LAURA : Well, Roger . . . Oh, I'm forgetting all about tea. Do help yourself. Let me give you some more. Pass your cup.

[WOODLEY *does so.*

WOODLEY : Do you like the poem ?

LAURA : Very much. Tell me something about yourself, Roger. Your home is in London, isn't it ?

WOODLEY : Yes, in Hampstead. Do you know it ?

LAURA : No, not at all. Have you any brothers or sisters ?

WOODLEY : No, none.

LAURA : Your parents are alive ?

WOODLEY : Only my father. My mother died when I was a baby. I've an aunt who lives with us. She brought me up, really.

LAURA : Yes, I was an only child, too. It stamps one, I think. I was awfully lonely. Were you ?

WOODLEY : No, I don't think so.

LAURA : Perhaps it was the country. My home was in the Lake District. Have you ever been there ?

WOODLEY : Yes, we spent one summer holiday at Borrowdale. I loved it. I did a lot of climbing. It's wonderful country.

LAURA : Isn't it ? My home was at Rydalwater. I lived there always until I was married. I still miss the mountains. They become like friends.

WOODLEY : Did you . . . did you meet Mr. Simmons there ?

LAURA : Yes. He was on a walking holiday.

WOODLEY : I didn't know he was keen on the country.

LAURA : He's very fond of climbing.

WOODLEY : Is he ? Oh . . .

LAURA : You are not eating anything. Do have some cake.

WOODLEY : No, thanks very much. I've finished.

LAURA : But you've had nothing.

WOODLEY : Really, thanks.

LAURA : More tea ?

WOODLEY : No, thanks. Nothing.

LAURA : Really ? Well, let's get it out of the way. Perhaps you would move the tray, would you ? You might put it over there.

[WOODLEY *moves tray to armchair L.U.*

LAURA : Will you have a cigarette . . . or . . . I suppose you're not allowed to smoke ? (*She pats settee.* WOODLEY *sits.*)

WOODLEY : No . . . thanks very much.

LAURA : We have met several times lately, walking, haven't we ? You are fond of the country ?

WOODLEY : Yes, it's looking lovely now, with the hawthorn out. And the trees are wonderful.

LAURA : Do you ever go up to Mallow Woods ?

WOODLEY : No, they are out of bounds.

LAURA : Are they ? I wonder why. I was thinking of walking over there on Sunday . . . to-morrow, perhaps you . . .

WOODLEY : I wouldn't, if I were you.

LAURA : Why ever not ?

WOODLEY : Oh, Sundays . . . I don't think . . . I mean, the townspeople go, and it isn't always . . . well . . . quite nice.

LAURA : Oh, then I won't. (*She gets cigarette from mantel. After pause.*) Tell me, I was meaning to

ask you. There's a little boy called Cope . . . he is the prefects' fag, isn't he ?

WOODLEY : Yes. What about him ?

LAURA : What sort of a boy is he ?

WOODLEY : Oh, just a kid. Why ?

LAURA : He came to me the other day . . . with some rather embarrassing questions. I wondered why . . . whether it really was ignorance and curiosity—or whether it was done for a joke.

WOODLEY : What did he want to know ?

LAURA : It was about this business with the Riley boy. He wanted to know about that.

WOODLEY : The little . . . I say, I'm awfully sorry. He ought to have had more sense, but he's awfully innocent.

LAURA : You think it really was innocence ?

WOODLEY : Oh, yes, rather—unless——

LAURA : Unless—— ?

WOODLEY : Nothing. I'm awfully sorry, though.

LAURA : It's not your fault. Besides, if it was genuine, it doesn't matter. Go on telling me about yourself, Roger. What are you going to do when you leave school ?

WOODLEY : I shall be going to Cambridge, I think, in October. I'm looking forward to it awfully.

LAURA : Then this is your last term here ? You'll be leaving in July ? I hadn't realised it.

WOODLEY : Yes, I—I'm afraid so. And after that my father wants me to go into his business, I think. I'm not very keen.

LAURA : What is it ?

WOODLEY : Soap.

LAURA : Soap ?

WOODLEY : Yes. Woodley's Wildflowers. Pretty awful, isn't it ? Still, I dare say it won't be so bad.

LAURA : Is there anything you'd rather do ?

WOODLEY : I don't know. Sometimes I think I want to write. But I suppose that's just a phase that I'll pass through.

LAURA : I'm sorry my husband spoke to you as he did the other evening about your writing.

WOODLEY : Oh, please, it's quite all right.

LAURA : I've been wanting to tell you that. It hurt me.

WOODLEY : Oh, it doesn't matter. I don't think Mr. Simmons quite understands.

LAURA : No. He's not very popular, is he ?

WOODLEY : Oh, I——

LAURA : You needn't mind telling me. Or, you needn't tell me. I know he's not. I don't know why I asked.

WOODLEY : I don't think he means it.

LAURA : Do you wonder I don't care to go to school functions, when I know how people are feeling towards him, hating him, and me, as his wife, as though, just because I am his wife, I must be like him. Do you wonder that I loathe the place ?

WOODLEY : Loathe it ?

LAURA : Yes, loathe it. It's all dreadful, hideous. And he——

WOODLEY : I'm so sorry—I had no idea. Don't—don't cry, please.

LAURA : Oh, God, why are things made like that? Why have people no sense, no understanding? I'm sorry. I didn't mean to behave like that. Please forgive me. It won't happen again, Roger. (*She touches his hand lightly; he flinches.*)

WOODLEY : I wish I could help, do something. I'd do anything.

LAURA : It's all right. It was foolish of me. I am all right now.

WOODLEY : And it's not like you think. No one feels like that about you. They all like you awfully. They can't understand . . .

LAURA : How I came to marry Mr. Simmons. Is that it?

WOODLEY : I must be going.

LAURA : Must you really?

WOODLEY : Yes, I have work to do. Good-bye and—thank you very much.

LAURA : I'm sorry. You must come again soon.

WOODLEY : No—I—think—if you don't mind—it would be better—if I didn't come again.

LAURA : Never?

WOODLEY : Well, not alone—not like this.

LAURA : You needn't mind what you said—or rather didn't say—about Mr. Simmons.

WOODLEY : It isn't that.

LAURA : What is it, then ? Don't you want to come ?

WOODLEY : Yes, I—I want to awfully, but—really, it would be better not.

LAURA : But why, Roger ?

WOODLEY : Oh, I—I oughtn't to tell you. You'll hate me for it. You'll never want to see me again—but I—I feel awful about it—but—but—well, I'm most terribly in love with you. There, now I've said it. Are you furious with me ?

LAURA : Furious ?

WOODLEY : I meant not to tell you ever—but I couldn't help it. I'll go now. (*He moves to door.*)

LAURA : Roger, why did you think I'd be furious ?

WOODLEY : Well, aren't you ?

LAURA : Furious ? Roger——

[*She holds out her arms to him. He stands and gazes at her a moment wide-eyed, then stumbles across to her and falls on his knees beside the sofa, his head in her lap.*

Roger darling—Roger——

[*She stoops and kisses his head. He raises his face to hers. His arm slips around her shoulders and their lips meet in a long kiss.*

Don't cry.

[*She raises him to the sofa beside her.*

WOODLEY : Oh, I've been feeling so awful about this. I do love you so terribly. You're so wonderful. I never dreamt—— (*He takes her hand and kisses it passionately.*) And you're unhappy—I couldn't

bear to see you—like that. It was dreadful. Why did you marry him ? You don't love him ?

LAURA : No.

WOODLEY : Why—why did you ?

LAURA : I don't know. I was lonely, and—don't speak of him now. Roger, my darling. (*She buries her lips in his hair.*)

WOODLEY : All day long I've been telling myself I wouldn't come this afternoon. I thought I oughtn't to see you again. I thought it was wrong and wicked of me, and that you'd hate me if you knew. You mustn't stay with him, you must leave him, now that you know I love you like this.

LAURA : I can't, Roger. You mustn't think of it. It's impossible.

WOODLEY : You must, Laura. I love you more than anything in the world. Laura——

LAURA : Roger, kiss me again. Don't speak, kiss me.

[*Another rapturous embrace follows. While they are locked in each other's arms,* SIMMONS *appears at the open window. He stands transfixed.*

SIMMONS : Laura !

[*The couple on the sofa leap apart startled.* WOODLEY *starts, rises.* SIMMONS *comes down centre, now in control of himself.*

Will you have the goodness to explain what this extraordinary conduct means ?

WOODLEY : I am in love with your wife.

SIMMONS : Indeed ? And you have the face to tell me that.

LAURA (*rises*) : Frank——

WOODLEY : Yes, why not ? I've told her.

SIMMONS : I think you had better remove yourself, my friend, and the sooner the better. I'll deal with you later.

WOODLEY : No—we must have this out now.

LAURA : Roger—go, please.

WOODLEY : I am not afraid of him—now.

SIMMONS : Indeed ? How very interesting—quite a knight-errant, in fact. *Sans peur et sans reproche !* And what has made you so brave all of a sudden ? However, we'll see about that. You will now go to your study and wait for me there.

WOODLEY : No, I won't go. I'll stay here.

LAURA : Roger, I asked you——

WOODLEY : I've a right to stay. I've a right to know what he is going to do.

SIMMONS : You'll learn that soon enough, my friend.

WOODLEY : You think because I'm a boy and you're my housemaster——

LAURA : Roger, please——

WOODLEY : Very well, I'll go.

SIMMONS : Thank you.

WOODLEY : If you want me, Laura——

LAURA : Yes—go now——

[WOODLEY *goes L.*

SIMMONS : Well, this is a charming situation. So this is what it has come to.

LAURA : Yes.

SIMMONS : Yes ? Is that all you have to say ? Yes ? Don't you realise what this means ? Here —in my drawing-room—with one of my own boys—and Woodley of all boys.

LAURA : Well ?

SIMMONS : How could you so humiliate yourself ? and me, too ?

LAURA : Ah !

SIMMONS : To cheapen yourself like that ! If you had no moral sense to restrain you, I should have thought at least you had more sense of your own dignity, of your position.

LAURA : My dignity, my position ! I've none—none ! (*Rises.*)

SIMMONS : Well, mine, then. You are my wife ; you hold a position of trust, of responsibility. That's what you have never realised.

LAURA : I am a human being. That's what you have never realised.

SIMMONS : Oh, please spare me that cant. You will be telling me next that you are only flesh and blood, and that you have red blood in your veins.

LAURA : Well, so I have. Not—mineral water, like you !

SIMMONS : Do you think you can justify your conduct by abusing me ?

LAURA : You don't consider the possibility of my being in love with him ?

SIMMONS : In love with a boy like that. Don't be ridiculous. How long has this been going on ?

LAURA : Going on ? I don't understand. What ?

SIMMONS : This little affair of yours. It accounts for a good deal. I am beginning to understand quite a lot of things. This is the meaning of your talk of a woman's influence——

LAURA : You are wrong, Frank, to-day was the first time that there has ever been anything.

SIMMONS : Why do you bother to lie to me ?

LAURA : You don't believe me ?

SIMMONS : I do not. (*Goes to desk.*)

LAURA : Then you must do the other thing. It is true, all the same. (*Crosses L.*)

SIMMONS : The transparency of it ! You ask him here when you know that I am out of the way. You lie to me, tell me that you asked Ainger, as well, to divert my suspicions.

LAURA : I did ask Ainger, as it happens.

SIMMONS : Oh, don't quibble. Yes, you asked him when you knew he couldn't come. Hypocrisy. Ainger was playing in the match, and you knew it perfectly well.

LAURA (*taking letter*) : Very well, then. Read that. A note from Ainger. Woodley brought it with him. Now.

SIMMONS (*crosses down to her, after reading it*) : H'm —well——

LAURA : Well ?

SIMMONS : I apologise.

LAURA : Thank you.

SIMMONS : So this was a mere affair of the moment on which I so unfortunately intruded ?

LAURA : Yes.

SIMMONS : And you are in no way ashamed of your behaviour ?

LAURA (*crosses to mantel*) : Ashamed ? No. Sorry, perhaps.

SIMMONS : I'll make him sorry. That young man is going to pay for his amusement.

LAURA : What are you going to do ?

SIMMONS : Do ? What do you suppose ? Do you imagine that I am going to keep him here now ? I shall go straight to the Head—get him expelled. (*Goes to desk, gets cap and gown ; to centre.*)

LAURA : Frank, you can't ! (*Crosses to him.*)

SIMMONS : Can't I ? Ha !

LAURA : No, you can't. Frank, listen, it was my fault . . . utterly, I led him on—I made him make love to me—I was a fool, yes, if you like. God knows why I did it, but just for an instant I forgot everything—everything. Nothing seemed to matter but the moment.

SIMMONS : Ve-ry nice.

LAURA : You can't expel him—you musn't. It was my fault, I tell you—mine—all of it. You can't make him suffer for it.

SIMMONS : Oh, I dare say. I have no doubt that you were as much to blame as he. But a boy is not bound to make love to a woman merely because she asks him to—and that woman the

wife of his housemaster. No, he'll pay for it all right. (*Moves down.*)

LAURA : Frank—I tell you—there has been nothing—nothing wrong between us. I swear it. I don't know what you imagine, but that kiss . . . that you saw . . . that was the first—the first time ever. How could he help it, when I behaved as I did. It was mad of me—mad—I know.

SIMMONS : You are beginning to realise it ?

LAURA : You can't expel him for that. You don't realise what it will mean to him . . . it will follow him through life, ruin him.

SIMMONS : You have betrayed me, utterly. Do you think I shall tolerate that ? No, by God ! Ruin him, indeed ! Well, I hope it will. I'll do all I can. I shall go to the Head now—at once. (*He turns to door.*)

LAURA : Frank.

[SIMMONS *at door L.*

SIMMONS : I don't think there is any need to prolong this discussion. (*Turns again to door.*)

LAURA : Wait. (*Crosses centre level with him.*) Frank, if Woodley goes, if you get him expelled, I'll leave you.

SIMMONS : Don't be childish.

LAURA : I mean it.

SIMMONS : Rubbish—you couldn't.

LAURA : I mean it, Frank. It has not been much of a success, our marriage, and you know it. I've tried, God knows, I've tried, but this will be the

end. If you do this, I shall leave you, for good—I have thought of it often enough these last few months.

SIMMONS : You can't blackmail me into giving way, Laura.

LAURA : You can call it what you like. It's true though. (*She turns to settee.*)

SIMMONS : You are insane. You don't realise what you are saying. How could you leave me? (*Crosses to centre table.*)

LAURA : How? How? You haven't realised how near I have been before, how wretched I've been, what a ghastly mistake our marriage has been. You have been too wrapped up in your position, your little dignity, your own self-importance. Well, think of them now, then. Where will they be, how will you feel, if I leave you—openly—as I shall if you do this thing. Everyone will know . . . don't deceive yourself about that . . . where will your position and your authority be then?

SIMMONS : Laura, what is the meaning of this? Why are you taking this line? The thing is incredible!

[LAURA *sitting in armchair at end of speech.*

LAURA : I tell you . . . you can choose. If he goes, I go.

SIMMONS : But—but . . . I don't understand this. Are you in love with the boy that you are behaving in this amazing way? (*Crosses to settee.*)

LAURA : You said that was impossible.

SIMMONS : I should have thought it was, but women are unaccountable. Are you ?

LAURA : I don't know—yes, perhaps. But never mind that.

SIMMONS : Oh, this is beyond me ! But if . . . if . . . if I do let this go for your sake—— (*Crosses to door R. then down to centre.*) But how can I ? You must realise how impossible the situation is. It will be all over the school. My life won't be worth living. I shall be an object of ridicule. (*Sits by tea table.*)

LAURA (*over chair*) : And if I leave you, what then ? An object of pity ? But you need not fear. (*Rises.*) Nobody will know. How should they ?

SIMMONS : How ? I should have thought it was obvious. Young Woodley isn't going to keep this to himself, his triumph over me—how I caught you . . . and did nothing.

LAURA : He won't tell. I can answer for that.

SIMMONS : And meanwhile I am to let it continue—connive at your carrying on with him, while I sit and play the *mari complaisant* ? Is it likely ? Humiliate myself like that . . . for a damned, smirking, superior little pup of a school boy ! Not I ! Do you think I have no pride ? I'll face the talk and scandal rather. (*He moves to door.*)

LAURA : Frank, listen. (*Crosses centre.*) If you do nothing to him I promise—I won't see him again. I'll do all I can for you, to play my part better as your wife. I mean it, Frank.

SIMMONS : You seem to forget that the mischief

is done. Am I to see him always—laughing up his sleeve, knowing that he has got the better of me, that I am afraid to move?

LAURA: If you think of him like that . . . besides, what is the alternative? It is he—or everyone. But I tell you, you will have nothing to fear. Nobody will know, and it shall never happen again—never. I have learned my lesson; some things are too dearly bought. And this is his last term here. There you have it, Frank. If you ruin him, as you want to do, I shall leave you, openly and for ever, make no mistake about that; there is nothing to hold me. It is only your pride that makes you hesitate; but if you will conquer that, I promise you everything shall be all right, always. Now you can choose. (*She sits on settee.*)

SIMMONS (*after a long pause at centre window*): Laura, I know everything?

LAURA: Yes.

SIMMONS: I shall think it over.

[*Goes.* LAURA *rises and rings bell.* MAID *comes.*

LAURA: Will you take the tea-things, Maud?

MAID: Yes'm. And please'm, young Mr. Woodley is waiting in the hall.

LAURA: Mr. Woodley?

MAID: Yes'm—he has been waiting about a quarter of an hour.

LAURA: Oh——

[MAID *takes tea-things and goes to door.*

MAID: Will you see Mr. Woodley now, mum?

LAURA : Yes—show him in.

[MAID *goes*. LAURA *moves to centre*. MAID *shows* WOODLEY *in and retires. He moves quickly to her. She puts out her hand to stop him.*

WOODLEY : What has happened ?

LAURA : It is all right. It will be all right.

WOODLEY : What did he say ? I've been waiting outside, waiting until you were alone. Why wouldn't you let me stay ?

LAURA : I couldn't—you must understand that.

WOODLEY : What did he say ? Is he going to divorce you ?

LAURA : Divorce ? In heaven's name why should he ?

WOODLEY : Why ? When he saw what he did ?

LAURA : You don't divorce your wife because you find someone kissing her.

WOODLEY : But I love you. I told him that.

LAURA : Even so . . .

WOODLEY : But I don't understand. What did you mean when you said it would be all right ?

LAURA : That he is not going to do anything.

WOODLEY : You call that all right ?

LAURA : You don't understand me. I was thinking of you. It will go no further.

WOODLEY : But—but—I wasn't thinking of myself. That doesn't matter now. It's you,

Laura—you can't stay with him, feeling about him as you do . . . after that . . . after he saw . . . after I told him. He must divorce you. I don't know how these things are done, but surely, when people find that things are like that—they don't stay together.

LAURA : Roger, come and sit down. I want to talk to you.

[*She goes to her old corner on the chesterfield. He is about to follow.*

No, over there.

[*She points to chair at right-angles to chesterfield. He sits.*

Roger, I don't know what you thought, but obviously this can go no further.

WOODLEY : Why ? I don't understand.

LAURA : You yourself said it would be better for you not to come again.

WOODLEY : But that—that was before I—it was because I was afraid . . . I was afraid to tell you what I felt. I thought you would hate me if you knew. I never dreamed that there was any chance —but now, now——

LAURA : Nothing has changed, Roger.

WOODLEY : Nothing ? But everything has changed. What do you mean ? You let me tell you—let me kiss you. You know I love you. You love me, too. Why—why do you say nothing has changed ?

LAURA : Roger—listen to me. It is hard for me to explain, but you are taking all this too seriously. It was wrong of me, I know, to behave as I did—to let you kiss me—but . . . I was sorry for you and—I just didn't think. But that is all there is to it. It means no more than that.

WOODLEY : You mean—you don't love me . . you were only—playing with me ?

[LAURA *is silent.*

Very well. Then I'll go.

[*He rises and goes to the door.*

LAURA : Wait—I haven't finished.

WOODLEY : What is it ? What do you want ?

LAURA : I want you to come and sit down again and listen to me quietly. Please.

[WOODLEY *returns to chair.*

WOODLEY : Well ?

LAURA : You must forget all this. I've been to blame, I know. I let you think I meant all sorts of things. I wanted you to think so. But now, as I say, it is over. You must be sensible and forget it. It won't be very difficult. There'll be your work and your games. You have been neglecting them . . . you've been getting too sentimental. And then you'll be leaving . . . there will be Cambridge. And new interests. Soon you'll be able to laugh about it. You blame me now. You think I've made a fool of you.

WOODLEY : I've made a fool of myself.

LAURA : No, Roger. Besides, you'll get over that.

You'll look on this differently in time. You'll hear no more of it, if you'll be sensible about it. I can promise you that. You needn't fear.

WOODLEY : As if that mattered now. As if I cared about that. Did you think that was why I came back ? But I'm sorry. I see I made a mistake. Thank you for—interceding with Mr. Simmons for me. But don't you think he would rather be rid of me ?

LAURA : Roger, please don't take it like that——

WOODLEY : Is there anything else ?

LAURA : No.

WOODLEY : Then I'll go. (*He goes to door. Stops and comes back a step or two.*) Oh—might I have my poems back ?

LAURA : Of course—I forgot. I'll give them to you.

[*She takes them from a locked drawer in the desk. Hands them to him and then goes over to the fireplace. He takes them, looks at them for a moment, and then tears them across twice and flings the pieces on the floor.*

Why do you do that ?

WOODLEY : I've been getting too sentimental. Good-bye.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

SCENE : *The Prefects' Room as before.*

TIME : *Tea-time. Two days later.*

MILNER *is sitting alone above the table L.C. finishing his tea. The gramophone is playing a revue tune.* VINING *comes in, he fox-trots idly around the room until the tune finishes. He turns off the machine and comes and sits down.*

VINING : We ought to get some records from the "Girl on the Landing." It's a first rate show, got some topping tunes in it. I saw it in the holidays. Pearl Rossiter is absolutely great. You've seen those photos in the *Sketch* of the pyjama scene, haven't you? She's Battling Sawyer's mistress, you know.

MILNER : How do you know?

VINING : Know? Why, everybody knows. Some peach, I tell you. Finest pair of legs in London, and doesn't she show 'em! My brother's been eight times—front row stalls—— Chuck me a chocolate biscuit, if there are any left.

MILNER : Catch.

[*He throws one.* VINING *picks it up from the floor.*

Where's everybody?

VINING : Ainger and Woodley are down at the nets. Haven't they been in to tea yet?

MILNER : Nobody's been in. Hello, here's Ainger.

[*Enter* AINGER.

AINGER : Any tea going ? (*He sits above table R. and pours out tea for himself.*)

MILNER : I say, Ainger, what is the matter with Simmy these days ?

AINGER : I don't know.

MILNER : He's in a hell of a rage about something. Look at the way he flared up in Second Maths this morning, because I hadn't got my protractor. He raved as if I had committed the seven deadly sins and then some.

AINGER : I don't know. Liver, I should think.

MILNER : Well, I don't see why I should have to suffer for his over-eating himself.

VINING : And what is the matter with young Woodley ? That kid's been going about looking like two pen'oth of Gord 'elp us, these last two days.

AINGER : I don't know. There is something wrong. I can't make out what it is. I can't get a word out of him. Simmy has been pretty hang-dog too.

MILNER : There is a bit of an atmosphere about the place. And I've seen him lurking through the corridors, too, in rubber-soled shoes. What's he after ? Is it still his purity stunt ? What did he want with you at the match on Saturday ? I saw him come and talk to you while you were putting your pads on, and I thought he looked rather fed. Did you say anything to annoy him ?

AINGER : I couldn't make that out. You know Mrs. Simmy asked Woodley and me to tea and

I couldn't go because of Townley's ankle. Well, Simmy came up and said : " Ah, Ainger, I didn't expect to find you here. I thought you found social distractions more absorbing than athletics," or some bilge like that. I didn't know what he was getting at, and anyway I was in a hurry, so I'm afraid I was rather terse with him. And then he asked if my " young satellite Woodley " was about. Well, I didn't see why I should tell him that Woodley had gone to tea with his wife. He probably only wanted an opportunity to get off some joke he'd prepared about it, so I said I did not know. He seemed no end peeved over that.

MILNER : What did it mean ?

AINGER : God only knows, I don't.

VINING : And had young Woodley gone to tea with languorous Laura ?

AINGER : Yes.

VINING : And Simmy was at the match. Lucky devil. Perhaps Simmy was jealous. Did he know you had been asked ?

AINGER : I don't know. Apparently Mrs. Simmy met Woodley in the lane and asked us then. I expect she told him.

VINING : Perhaps she didn't. Perhaps she wanted a *tête-à-tête*. Naughty ! Naughty ! I thought she had a crush on you, Ainger. Still, half a loaf is better than none. And when women get to that age they like 'em dewy and cherubimmy like young Woodley.

AINGER : I always told you he was a dark horse.

VINING : I must rag him about it. Did he say anything about it when he got back ?

AINGER : Divil a word. He spent the whole evening with his nose in Virgil and I couldn't get a word out of him. He's been like that ever since.

VINING : H'm—h'm ! We'll have some fun out of this.

AINGER : You're not to rag him, Vining ! The kid is upset about something.

VINING (*crossing to centre*) : Oh, rot. He probably tried to hold her hand and she wouldn't let him. Well, I'm going up. Coming, Milner ?

MILNER : Right you are. Open the door carefully. Simmy may be key-holing outside and you might give him a black eye.

[VINING *opens the door with a jerk. Looks to R. and L. Calls.*

VINING : Sim—my ! Sim—my ! Puss ! Puss ! Puss !

[VINING *and* MILNER *go out. Enter* WOODLEY.

AINGER : Hello !

[WOODLEY *does not answer. He comes to table. Sits down R. of it. Pours milk into his cup. Looks round for the teapot, pulls it away from* AINGER'S *book which falls into the jam.*

Here, look out. Mind my book. It's gone into the jam now.

WOODLEY : Sorry !

AINGER : Well, you might ask another time. What made you so late anyway ? You left the nets before I did.

WOODLEY : I thought you might have finished tea by now.

AINGER : What do you mean by that ?

WOODLEY : Oh, nothing. (*He goes to settle Knocks stuff down.*) Damn !

AINGER : What's up, eh ?

WOODLEY : Nothing. Your monkey is, apparently.

AINGER : Oh, don't be funny.

WOODLEY : I wasn't being funny. I was speaking the truth.

AINGER : You wanted to avoid having tea with me. Was that it ?

WOODLEY : Oh, shut up. I'm trying to read.

[AINGER *takes book and throws it into corner.*

AINGER : Now then. What is it ?

WOODLEY : If you won't let me have my tea in peace, I must go.

AINGER : Sit down and don't be a damned fool.

WOODLEY : Will you let me go ?

AINGER : No, I won't. I want to have this out.

WOODLEY : Well, you can want, then.

AINGER : I say, I'm sorry if I was shirty.

WOODLEY : So you ought to be.

AINGER : Won't you tell me what is the matter ?

WOODLEY : There's nothing the matter with me. You seem to be suffering from hallucinations.

[WOODLEY *cuts piece off loaf.*

AINGER : Look out. You'll cut your hand. That knife's sharp.

WOODLEY : Well, I didn't imagine it was blunt.

AINGER : What is it, kid ? Has Simmy been worrying you ?

WOODLEY : Simmy——? Has he said anything ?

AINGER : What about ?

WOODLEY : Oh, nothing.

AINGER : There's something going on, I know. Can't you tell me ? It'll do you good to get it off your chest.

WOODLEY : Oh, go and relieve someone else's chest for a bit, and leave me alone, damn you.

AINGER : Oh, very well. If you're going to take it like that, I've got something to say to you.

WOODLEY : Oh, what ?

AINGER : Only that, if you are going to walk out with shop girls, I shouldn't do it *coram populo* if I were you. It's dangerous and it's silly.

WOODLEY : What do you mean ?

AINGER : I've been waiting to see if you had anything to say before I mentioned it.

WOODLEY : What ? What are you driving at ?

AINGER : Only that I happened to see you and the girl from Crawley's on the Mallow Road yesterday afternoon.

WOODLEY : Well, why shouldn't I ?

AINGER : Oh, no reason at all. Only you were going on hot enough against it yourself the other day.

WOODLEY : I was a young fool the other day.

AINGER : And since then you have learned wisdom ? Since Saturday afternoon ?

WOODLEY (*rising*) : What do you mean by that ?

AINGER : Oh, nothing. . . .

WOODLEY : Yes, you did. Who's been telling you ?

AINGER : Telling me what ? Look here, kid, for the thousandth time, what's the trouble ? What in God's name possessed you to go and do a damn fool thing like that ? I didn't say anything, but I could see something was wrong when you got back on Saturday. I was hoping you'd tell me. You always have told me things. You know I wouldn't go back on you.

[WOODLEY *sits chair R. of table.* AINGER *on side of table.*

I'll do anything I can to help, kid, honest I will, you know that. Tell me, there's a good fellow.

WOODLEY : Oh, God ! I've been a fool . . . what a Hell's game life is ! You were right. I was with Crawley's girl yesterday afternoon. I went because I didn't care what happened, or who saw me. I met her outside the town and she asked me to go for a walk in the woods.

AINGER : And what happened ?

WOODLEY : Can't you guess ? Oh, God, I wish I hadn't . . . it was awful . . . awful !

AINGER : What made you—you of all people ?

WOODLEY : I tell you I didn't care. . . . I didn't care about anything.

AINGER : But why ? What happened to change you like that ?

WOODLEY : I can't tell you. . . . I can't. Don't ask me.

AINGER : Has it anything to do with Mrs. Simmy ?

WOODLEY : Don't.

AINGER : What was it, boy ?

WOODLEY : Swear . . . swear you'll never tell . . . on your oath !

AINGER : I swear.

WOODLEY : Well, then . . . No, I can't—it's no good . . . I can't. Don't ask. I can't tell. You won't tell about yesterday . . . Vining, or any of the others ?

AINGER : Of course not.

WOODLEY : It won't happen again . . . ever. I can promise you that. It was horrible—beastly. I feel dirty all over. But it just seemed as though nothing mattered.

AINGER : Don't let it worry you, kid. I wish I could help you.

WOODLEY : Thanks. But you can't. I shall get over it in time, I suppose. Ainger, do you hate me for yesterday . . . like I hated Vining ?

AINGER : Of course not.

WOODLEY : I hate myself.

[*A knock.*

AINGER : Who's there ?

[COPE *appears.*

COPE : Please, Ainger, can I clear away ?

WOODLEY : Oh, yes, clear away. (*Crosses to fireplace.*)

AINGER : I'm just going to put up the lists. I'll be back in a minute.

[AINGER *goes.*

WOODLEY : By the way, Cope, I want to talk to you.

COPE : Yes, Woodley.

WOODLEY : What the hell do you mean by asking Mrs. Simmons about Riley ?

COPE : Mean ? I wanted to know what he'd done.

WOODLEY : Didn't you know ?

COPE : No, Woodley. No one would tell me. And Vining told me to ask her.

WOODLEY : Vining ?

COPE : Yes, Woodley.

WOODLEY : Told you to ask her ?

COPE : Yes, Ainger and Milner were here, they'll tell you.

WOODLEY : You little fool, he was only pulling your leg. How could you go and ask a woman a thing like that ?

COPE : I didn't know what it was.

WOODLEY : Do you know now ?

COPE : Yes, Woodley.

WOODLEY : Did—did Mrs. Simmons tell you ?

COPE : No . . . not properly. Vining told me.

WOODLEY : Vining ! Does he know you asked her ?

COPE : No, I didn't tell him. I didn't think she'd like me to. He asked me yesterday if I had found out yet . . . and then he told me.

WOODLEY : That's all, Cope. Clear out.

COPE : Yes, Woodley. What about the tea-things ?

WOODLEY : Oh, leave them. Come back later.

COPE : Yes, Woodley.

[COPE *goes whistling.* WOODLEY *takes a book and goes to window seat.* VINING *and* MILNER *come in.*

VINING : Hello, cherub. Isn't Ainger here ?

WOODLEY : He'll be back in a minute.

[MILNER *starts gramophone.*

Don't put that thing on. Vining, I want to talk to you.

VINING : Always at your service, sweet one.

WOODLEY : Did you tell Cope to ask Mrs. Simmons about Riley ?

VINING : I believe I did. Has he asked her ?

WOODLEY : Why did you ?

VINING : Oh, for a joke. Why, what's the trouble ?

WOODLEY : You think it was a joke, do you ? I think it was a cad's trick.

VINING : And who asked your opinion ?

WOODLEY : No one, I give it to you gratis. I think it was a beastly thing to do.

VINING : Do you now ?

WOODLEY : Yes, I do. A filthy, swinish thing. The kid didn't know what he was asking.

VINING : Well, he knows now, anyway.

WOODLEY : Yes, thanks to you and your filthy mind.

VINING : Here ! what's got your goat, Woodley ?

[AINGER *comes in.*

I say, Ainger, Cope has been asking Mrs. Simmy about Riley's offence.

WOODLEY : Yes, and you let Vining put him up to it.

MILNER : How do you know he asked her ? Did he tell you ?

VINING : Or did *she* ?

WOODLEY : Never you mind.

VINING : I didn't know you were on such intimate terms with the Lady Laura as that, Woodley. Have you been playing the young Don Juan at your *tête-à-tête* teas ?

WOODLEY : What do you mean by that ?

VINING : Oho ! Got him on the raw have we ? And did she virtuously repulse you ?

AINGER : Shut up, Vining.

MILNER : Hard luck, Woodley. Try someone more accessible next time. Crawley's girl, for instance.

WOODLEY : What do you mean ?

VINING : But don't be discouraged. Remember, " If a lady says ' no ' she means ' perhaps,' and if she says ' perhaps ' she means ' yes ' : for if she says ' yes ' . . . she's no lady." Try our

luscious Laura again. . . . If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Remember Bruce and the spider . . .

WOODLEY (*livid*) : Shut up, Vining, or I'll kill you.

VINING : What did she say, Woodley. " I would if I could, but I want to be good and I'm not that kind of a girl " ? Never mind, it's only done to egg you on to further flights.

WOODLEY : My God ! . . .

[*He grabs knife from table and rushes at* VINING, AINGER *seizes* WOODLEY *and holds him back.* VINING *runs to fireplace.*

AINGER : Woodley, what are you doing ?

WOODLEY : Let me get at him . . . !

MILNER : Take care . . . he's got a knife !

AINGER : *Woodley !*

[SIMMONS *enters.*

MILNER : Look out !

SIMMONS : And what is the meaning of this, may I ask ? What is the significance of the knife and the elaborate tableau ?

WOODLEY : I wanted to kill him ! I wanted to kill him !

SIMMONS : What does this mean ? Was Woodley attacking you, Ainger ?

AINGER : No, sir.

SIMMONS : What was it ? Tell me, I insist on knowing. Was it Vining ?

WOODLEY : Yes. (*He drops knife.*)

SIMMONS : You were attacking Vining with that knife ?

WOODLEY : Yes.

SIMMONS : Why, may I ask ?

WOODLEY : Oh, what does it matter ? You've got what you wanted, haven't you ? What you've been waiting for. Here's your opportunity, now expel me and have done with it !

SIMMONS : How dare you speak like that to me, sir.

WOODLEY : Dare ? . . . Dare . . . ? (*A fit of shivering seizes him. He clutches at the table for support. Little strangled sounds escape him.*)

SIMMONS : Come, pull yourself together, boy. . . . Don't behave like an hysterical school girl.

WOODLEY : Take me away and have done with it. You've won. Need you bully me now ?

SIMMONS : Help me get him into the sick-room, Ainger. I shall want to see you later, all of you. Come, sir. Take his other arm.

[*He tries to take* WOODLEY'S *arm.* WOODLEY *pulls away and goes to the door alone.* SIMMONS *and* AINGER *follow.*

CURTAIN

SCENE II

SCENE : *Laura's Drawing-room.*

TIME : *The following afternoon. When the curtain rises* LAURA *is at the window. The maid shows in* AINGER *and retires.*

LAURA : Good afternoon. You got my message ?

AINGER : Yes. You wanted to see me ?

LAURA : Yes. I'm glad you've come.

AINGER : What can I do, Mrs. Simmons ?

LAURA : I want you to tell me about this trouble with Woodley.

AINGER : What about it ?

LAURA : Everything. I only heard of it this afternoon. His father has been sent for, you know. He arrived an hour ago. He is with the Headmaster now. I want to know what it is all about.

AINGER : Has Mr. Simmons not told you ?

LAURA : Practically nothing. He was in a hurry.

AINGER : Wouldn't it be better perhaps to wait for him ?

LAURA : There's no time. I must know now. I want you to tell me. Sit down, won't you ?

[*They sit.*

Now, please.

AINGER : It's very difficult for me, Mrs. Simmons.

LAURA : I know. But, however difficult it is, you must tell me. There are reasons why I must know. You are his friend, that's why I sent for you.

AINGER : Well, he has not been very well lately, I think. I don't know why . . . depressed and . . . we couldn't get him to talk. And then yesterday, in the Prefects' Room, the others

were ragging him, and he lost his temper. They went further than they meant, I think, and . . . I tell you he has not been quite himself . . . he . . . he picked up a knife and went for them.

LAURA : Was anyone hurt ?

AINGER : No . . . I stopped him.

LAURA : And then . . . ?

AINGER : And then Mr. Simmons came in. That's all.

LAURA : I see. What were they ragging him about ?

AINGER : Please . . . don't ask me that, Mrs. Simmons.

LAURA : I must. I'm sorry, but I must. It must have been something serious to drive him to that. What was it ?

AINGER : Really . . . I . . . I can't tell you that.

LAURA : You must . . . whatever it is. You needn't be afraid. What was it ?

AINGER : It was about you.

LAURA : What about me ?

AINGER : Really, Mrs. Simmons. . . . Well . . . about making love to you.

LAURA : About ? . . . How did they know ?

AINGER : They didn't know. It was only ragging.

LAURA : Does Mr. Simmons know this ?

AINGER : No.

LAURA : Did Woodley say nothing ?

AINGER : Nothing. I think he would rather you wouldn't tell him.

LAURA : I shan't tell him. Is that all ?

AINGER : I think so. Yes.

LAURA : When was this ?

AINGER : At tea-time yesterday.

LAURA : Where is he now ?

AINGER : In the sick-room. We took him there.

LAURA : He offered no explanation ?

AINGER : No. . . . He said something . . . I couldn't quite understand. I didn't think of it at the time . . . but afterwards I wondered . . . about Mr. Simmons having won. I don't know what he meant.

LAURA : I think I do. What does this mean, Ainger ? Expulsion ?

AINGER : I'm afraid so, yes. Mr. Simmons's idea is that he is dangerous, abnormal. He talked to us afterwards.

LAURA : You did not tell him why it happened ?

AINGER : We told him they were ragging him. He did not ask why.

LAURA : No. (*Rising.*) Thank you, Ainger. I'm very grateful indeed to you for having spoken . . . frankly . . . as you have.

AINGER : I don't know whether you'll think it impertinent. . . .

LAURA : Well ?

AINGER : There's nothing you could do—or say . . . to save him ?

LAURA : Nothing, I'm afraid. You're fond of Woodley, Ainger ?

AINGER : Yes, very.

LAURA : He confides in you ?

AINGER : Sometimes. But I know nothing of this.

LAURA : But you guess . . . a lot ?

AINGER : That's my affair.

LAURA : I'm sorry, Ainger. Have I spoiled your friendship with him ?

AINGER : I'm not likely to see him again. I'm leaving in July and going out East at once.

LAURA : I'm sorry.

AINGER : Is there anything else ?

LAURA : No. And thank you. And Ainger . . . please believe . . . I can do nothing. It would only make things worse.

[AINGER *bows.*

You can go out this way.

AINGER : Thank you.

LAURA : Would you like to see him before he goes ?

AINGER : They won't let me.

LAURA : I think I can arrange it, if you'd like to.

AINGER : Oh, yes, I should like to.

LAURA : Well, come back in ten minutes, and wait in the hall. I'll see what I can do.

AINGER : Thank you.

LAURA : Good-bye.

AINGER : Good-bye.

[*He goes. Voices heard off.* LAURA *looks at door L. Goes out R.* SIMMONS *and* MR. WOODLEY *come in L. The latter is a business man of a little over fifty.*

SIMMONS : Well, there you have it, Mr. Woodley. You've heard the Head's opinion, and . . .

MR. W. : Frankly, Mr. Simmons, I don't understand this. A boy doesn't attack another with a knife for no reason at all.

SIMMONS : Not a normal boy, I agree. That's the whole point.

MR. W. : You've made that remark before. What are you driving at ?

SIMMONS : I don't consider your son a normal boy by any means, Mr. Woodley.

MR. W. : I must say this is an extraordinary affair. Has this abnormality you speak of manifested itself in any other way besides this incident ? Are you keeping something from me ?

SIMMONS : I have told you all I consider relevant. There have been a large number of things. I am not judging him on this alone, though naturally I regard it as a climax. . . . A boy who has allowed his self-control to get so far out of hand . . .

MR. W. : Yes, yes, yes. I've heard all that, and I say I don't understand it. Roger's not a baby ; he must be accustomed to teasing by this time. I should be obliged if you would tell me some of the things that you don't consider relevant. Perhaps I might.

SIMMONS : Really, Mr. Woodley, I should have thought this quite sufficient. But your son's behaviour lately has been far from satisfactory in every respect.

Mr. W.: Really, Mr. Simmons, you can hardly consider it unreasonable of me to ask for details. You wire me suddenly to come down here. You tell me that my son has been attacking other boys with a knife because they were teasing him, and that I must remove him at once because he's a danger to the school. You keep saying that he's not normal. Do you mean that he is out of his mind?

Simmons: Mr. Woodley, if you choose deliberately to misunderstand me . . .

Mr. W.: How can I help it? I've always found Roger a perfectly normal boy. A little shy and diffident, perhaps. What about this large number of things you spoke of? What, for instance?

Simmons: Well, for instance, then: his manner lately to me, and the other masters, has been extremely lacking in respect.

Mr. W.: I should hardly call that abnormal, myself. Anything else?

Simmons: His behaviour to my wife. . . .

Mr. W.: What about it?

Simmons: It has been . . . most objectionable.

Mr. W.: Do you mean he has been ungentlemanly?

Simmons: You don't quite understand me, Mr. Woodley.

Mr. W.: You don't make it very easy for me to do so. Look here, man. Is there anything behind all this, or isn't there? If you're concealing anything please stop doing so. I'm the boy's

father, and surely I'm entitled to know what he has done. He's been rude to your wife, is that it?

SIMMONS: No . . . it's far more than that. I found them here myself the other day. If I hadn't come in when I did, I can't say what might have happened.

MR. W.: Do you mean that he was making love to your wife?

SIMMONS: Well, bluntly . . . yes.

MR. W.: What do you mean exactly by "making love"?

SIMMONS: Well, really, Mr. Woodley . . . it's not exactly a question that I . . .

MR. W.: Do you mean that he was trying to seduce her?

SIMMONS: Well, I . . . I hardly . . .

MR. W.: Can't you answer one question simply? "Yes" or "No"?

SIMMONS: Well . . . yes, then.

Mr. W.: It is beyond me. As I say, Roger has always seemed to me to be a perfectly ordinary boy, rather quiet and reticent . . . too much so perhaps . . . and now you tell me that he has been attacking people with knives and assaulting your wife. . . .

SIMMONS: I have told you, Mr. Woodley, that I regard him as a dangerous influence . . . subversive. He thinks he's artistic, writes poetry, I know that kind of boy. I have not been a schoolmaster for twenty-five years for nothing. Highly dangerous . . .

MR. W. : The headmaster said nothing of this affair of your wife. You told him, I presume ?

SIMMONS : I—I had not done so. It—it only occurred yesterday, and with this coming on top of it, it seemed . . . well, you can imagine it's scarcely a pleasant matter for me. But he takes the same view of this business as I do, and in the circumstances it seemed hardly necessary . . .

MR. W. : Very well, Mr. Simmons, I'll take the boy away with me. As I say it's utterly beyond my comprehension but . . . I'd better see him and we'll catch the five o'clock train. You can send his things on afterwards. Where is he now ?

SIMMONS : In the sick-room. I'll send him to you. You can see him here.

MR. W. : Thank you, Mr. Simmons.

[SIMMONS *goes out L.* MR. W. *takes out time table, looks at it, when* LAURA *enters.*

LAURA : Mr. Woodley . . . !

MR. W. : I beg your pardon . . .

LAURA : Mr. Woodley, I must speak to you. I don't know what my husband has been telling you. . . .

MR. W. : Eh ? . . . Surely . . . are you . . . Mrs. Simmons ?

LAURA : Yes. I don't know what he has said, he is capable of saying anything. But I must speak to you now . . . quickly.

MR. W. : What is it ?

LAURA : I want to explain . . . as well as I can. . . . All this has been my fault.

MR. W. : Ah !

LAURA : Listen. I was attracted by your son. . . . I . . . I encouraged him, I made him make love to me. My husband found us . . . here.

MR. W. : Go on.

LAURA : I want you to understand that it was my fault . . . all of it. . . . This trouble yesterday —was all due to that. They were teasing him . . . about me . . . about being in love with me. I've treated him very badly, I know. I'm terribly, terribly sorry . . . more than I can say. I'd give anything, anything in the world, to unlive these last three days . . . but I want you to understand that I am to blame. If there is any way in which I can make reparation for what I have done . . .

MR. W. : This is rather different from your husband's story.

LAURA : I daresay.

MR. W. : He gave me to understand that my son had assaulted you.

LAURA : Ha ! You needn't believe that. It was I . . . it was iniquitous of me, I know, but I didn't realise what it meant . . . what it must mean to him. . . . I can never forgive myself.

MR. W. : Wait a moment. I'm beginning to understand . . . a good deal. Tell me, Mrs. Simmons . . . you probably know my son better than your husband does . . . do you consider him abnormal or . . . dangerous ?

LAURA : No. He's shy and . . . rather lonely, I think. But he is a charming boy.

MR. W. : So I gather.

LAURA : I know . . . I deserve that you should think hardly of me. I won't attempt to excuse myself. But please . . . don't let it hurt him . . . more than it must. He must go now : I understand that, but don't let it hurt him.

MR. W. : I don't quite follow.

LAURA : What will you do with him now ?

MR. W. : I really hadn't thought. I suppose in the circumstances, Cambridge is out of the question. . . .

LAURA : He wants sympathy and interest badly.

MR. W. : I know. I'm afraid that is partly my fault. We've never been very intimate, he and I. His mother died when he was quite small, and, somehow, we've always been rather shy of each other. Good friends, you know . . . but . . .

LAURA : Father and son. I understand.

MR. W. : My sister keeps house for me. She's always looked after him but—well, she is unmarried and it's not the same thing as a mother.

LAURA : Couldn't you take him away for a bit. Travel with him . . . get to know him.

MR. W. : I'm afraid it would be agony for us both . . . we should both die of shyness.

LAURA : Surely . . . surely you could conquer that, if you cared for him ?

MR. W. : As you do, Mrs. Simmons.

LAURA : You're right, I do love him . . . with all my heart. But you needn't be afraid. . . .

MR. W. : I'm not afraid. And . . . I'll do all I can. He'd better come into the business and . . . I'll play golf with him and get to know him as well as is possible for . . . father and son.

LAURA : I think he'll repay you.

MR. W. : I'll do my best.

[*They shake hands.*

LAURA : Thank you.

[*She goes out R.* SIMMONS *and* WOODLEY *come in L.*

SIMMONS : Well, I'll leave you together. I shall be in my study, within call, if you want me, Mr. Woodley.

MR. W. : Well, Roger ?

WOODLEY : Well ?

MR. W. : You know what this means, of course ?

WOODLEY : Yes, the sack.

MR. W. : Pretty serious, eh ?

WOODLEY : I suppose so.

MR. W. : What am I going to do with you ?

WOODLEY : Cut me off with a shilling, I should think. Kick me out. It'll save trouble in the long run. I've made a mess of things, and . . .

MR. W. : Don't try heroics on with me. They won't wash.

WOODLEY : Well, it's true.

MR. W. : Look here, Roger, have you anything you want to tell me ? I realise that there must be more in this than Mr. Simmons's story.

WOODLEY : That's enough, isn't it ?

MR. W. : I should like to hear your side.

WOODLEY : I haven't got one.

MR. W. : Well, what do you propose to do now ?

WOODLEY : You'd better send me to Borstal, I should think.

MR. W. : Roger, be serious. This isn't a joking matter.

WOODLEY : Everything is a joking matter . . . as far as I can make out.

MR. W. : Roger, won't you tell me what is the matter ?

WOODLEY : God only knows. Life. Or me. Or both.

MR. W. : You don't feel like being more explicit ?

WOODLEY : Father, you've heard Simmons's story. I admit it . . . every word of it. Isn't that enough ?

MR. W. : I should like to understand, Roger.

WOODLEY : I went for them with a knife. That's all. They were ragging me and I lost my temper, and I'm a danger to the place.

MR. W. : What were they ragging you about ?

WOODLEY : Never mind. It doesn't matter.

MR. W. : Surely . . . ?

WOODLEY : Oh, nothing. Just ragging.

MR. W. : Roger, I have been talking to Mrs. Simmons.

WOODLEY : Well, she doesn't know.

MR. W. : Yes, she does. She told me.

WOODLEY : How could she ? Who told her ? Did . . . oh !

MR. W. : Roger, she told me a lot of things.

WOODLEY : Father, don't ! Please drop it ! I'm being sacked—isn't that enough ?

MR. W. : I should like to understand your point of view, Roger.

WOODLEY : No. I've been a fool. That's all there is to it. Don't make me talk about it.

MR. W. : Very well, I'm afraid Cambridge is out of the question. You understand that ?

WOODLEY : I suppose so.

MR. W. : Would you care to come into the business at once ?

WOODLEY : Yes, if you like. Anything. . . . It doesn't matter.

MR. W. : You have no preference of your own ?

WOODLEY : No.

MR. W. : Would you care to go away for a holiday first ?

WOODLEY : No . . . no . . . I'll come into the business if you'll have me. The sooner the better, I should think.

MR. W. : Very well, Roger.

WOODLEY : Hadn't we better be going ? I don't want to take a last long farewell, or go and weep in Chapel, or anything like that. It's not exactly how I'd planned my departure but . . . is there anything to wait for ?

MR. W. : I don't think so. Mrs. Simmons would like to say good-bye to you.

WOODLEY : No. . . . No !

MR. W. : Why not, Roger ?

WOODLEY : Let's get away. I hate scenes.

MR. W. : You ought to say good-bye to her.

WOODLEY : No—I'm in disgrace.

MR. W. : Not with her.

WOODLEY : Father, don't. Let's get away. I can't stand this place now.

MR. W. : Very well. I'll go and tell Mr. Simmons.

[MR. W. *goes.* AINGER *appears at window.*

WOODLEY : Ainger !

AINGER : Yes.

WOODLEY : How did you know I was here ?

AINGER : Mrs. Simmons told me, I've been waiting outside.

WOODLEY : Mrs. Simmons ! Ainger . . . did you tell her . . . what it was all about ?

AINGER : Yes.

WOODLEY : How could you ? It was a cad's trick.

AINGER : She made me. I think she rather guessed.

WOODLEY : Oh, well, I don't suppose it matters much, one way or the other.

AINGER : I can't tell you, kid, how sorry I am about it all. There was nothing I could do. I couldn't tell Simmy.

WOODLEY : Well, it doesn't matter.

AINGER : I'll see to Vining though. Don't take it

too hard, old man. It's rotten, I know, but you've done nothing to be ashamed of.

WOODLEY : Haven't I ? Look here, you'd better clear. Simmy will be back in a minute. Good-bye.

AINGER : You might drop a line sometime.

WOODLEY : Right you are. Good-bye.

AINGER : Good-bye.

[*They shake hands.* AINGER *goes through window.* LAURA *enters R. and stands in doorway.* WOODLEY *stares out of window.*

LAURA : Roger, there are some things I want to say to you. Will you listen ?

WOODLEY : If you want me to.

[LAURA *crosses down R. and sits on settee.*

LAURA : Roger, I want to say how sorry I am for everything.

WOODLEY : That's all right.

LAURA : I know why this happened. . . .

WOODLEY : Please don't. . . .

LAURA : I must. Roger, do you hate me terribly ?

WOODLEY : No.

LAURA : I didn't mean those things I said when you came back the other afternoon.

[WOODLEY *turns to her bitterly.*

WOODLEY : You needn't go back on them now, because I'm going.

LAURA : I must. I want you to know the truth. Won't you come and sit down ?

WOODLEY : Is there any need ?

LAURA : Please.

[WOODLEY *comes and sits down.*

Roger, those things, I had to say them. They weren't true. I want you to think kindly of me if you can, Roger. It was a mistake, a ghastly mistake. I should never have let you tell me what you felt. I should never have shown you that I cared. But I did, Roger. I still care. Only . . . It can't be, that's all.

WOODLEY : Why did you . . . say those things ?

LAURA : I had to, Roger, to save you. I know they hurt. They hurt me, too. It tore my heart to say them, but I had to.

WOODLEY : No.

LAURA : I know you love me, Roger, as I love you. That love is a precious thing . . . too precious to hold. I don't want it to turn to gall inside you. I want you to treasure the memory, if you can, as I shall—always.

WOODLEY : Laura !

LAURA : We shan't meet again . . . ever, I expect. But I want you to remember . . . gladly, if you can.

WOODLEY : Gladly !

LAURA : Yes—gladly. You're young . . . you have the world before you. I want you to be happy. Don't let me be a bitterness and a reproach to you always . . . don't let me spoil

love for you. It's the most precious thing in the world . . . but it is so often wasted and it can be so cruel. It can turn so easily to hate and beastliness. Don't let me feel that I've done that for you.

WOODLEY : Never . . . Laura, never. I swear it.

[LAURA *takes his hand.*

LAURA : I have loved you, Roger—with all my heart. I want you to know that and remember it, that's all. (*She rises.*) Now, say good-bye to me.

[*He rises.*

WOODLEY : Laura . . . you're all the world . . . I can't . . . (*He takes her in his arms.*)

LAURA : Roger . . . dearest boy . . . you must be brave. Don't make it harder for me. (*With an effort he raises his head.*) Good-bye and God bless you always.

[*She kisses his forehead gently and then goes out L.* WOODLEY *falls on settee and breaks down. There is a knock on the door.* WOODLEY *pulls himself together.*

WOODLEY : Come in.

[MR. W. *comes in. He puts his arm round the boy's shoulder and smiles at him.*

MR. W. : Are you ready, Roger ?

WOODLEY : Quite ready.

[*They go.*

CURTAIN

MANY WATERS

MONCKTON HOFFE

MANY WATERS

PLAYS BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

The Little Damozel
Improper Peter
Panthea
Anthony in Wonderland
Carminetta
The Faithful Heart
The Lady Cristilinda
The Crooked Friday

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FIRST NIGHT PROGRAMME

LEON M. LION presents

MANY WATERS

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it . . ."

A New Play by MONCKTON HOFFE

ACT 1

SCENE I.—Theatreland

James Barcaldine NICHOLAS HANNEN
Mabel Barcaldine . MARDA VANNE
Compton Schloss . MILTON ROSMER
Secretary MARJORIE ST. AUBYN
Henry Delauney FRANK HARVEY

SCENE II.—Years ago at Earl's Court Exhibition

An Old Gentleman PAUL GILL
Another Old Gentleman STAFFORD HILLIARD
A Youth . WHITMORE HUMPHREYS
Mabel Wingrove . MARDA VANNE
James Barcaldine NICHOLAS HANNEN

SCENE III.—A Register Office

A Charwoman EDYTH GOODALL
A Junior Clerk GUY PELHAM BOULTON
A Man (Office Clerk) AUBREY DEXTER
Mabel Wingrove . MARDA VANNE
James Barcaldine NICHOLAS HANNEN
A Woman . MERCIA CAMERON
A Registrar . HAROLD B. MEADE

INTERVAL OF TEN MINUTES

ACT 2

SCENE I.—The Barcaldines' Flat (Years later)

Freda Barcaldine MAISIE DARRELL
James Barcaldine NICHOLAS HANNEN
Mabel Barcaldine . MARDA VANNE
Philip Sales GUY PELHAM BOULTON
Dolly Sales MARJORIE ST. AUBYN
Edith . MERCIA CAMERON
Stanley Rosel FRANK HARVEY

SCENE II.—The Plaza Club (On the same night)

Captain Bovill . AUBREY DEXTER
A Waiter . HAROLD B. MEADE
Freda Barcaldine MAISIE DARRELL
Godfrey Marvin ROBERT DOUGLAS

SCENE III.—The Barcaldines' Flat (An hour later)

James Barcaldine NICHOLAS HANNEN
Philip Sales GUY PELHAM BOULTON
Mabel Barcaldine . MARDA VANNE
Dolly Sales . MARJORIE ST. AUBYN
Freda Barcaldine MAISIE DARRELL

SCENE IV.—The Barcaldines' Flat (A few months later)

Mabel Barcaldine . MARDA VANNE
James Barcaldine NICHOLAS HANNEN
A Nurse . . VIOLET PENULE
Another Nurse GWENDOLINE HILL
Edith . MERCIA CAMERON
Dr. Sangster . PAUL GILL
Dr. Hinchcliff . MILTON ROSMER

SCENE V.—Rosel's Office (Four weeks later)

Typist GWENDOLINE HILL
Clerk WHITMORE HUMPHREYS
Stanley Rosel FRANK HARVEY
Doris Rosel . . EDYTH GOODALL

SCENE VI.—Bankruptcy Buildings (The same day)

James Barcaldine NICHOLAS HANNEN
The Registrar MONCKTON HOFFE
Official Receiver . STAFFORD HILLIARD
Mr. Clinchpole PAUL GILL
Mr. Everitt GUY PELHAM BOULTON
Stanley Rosel . FRANK HARVEY
Associate . HAROLD B. MEADE
An Usher . . ROBERT DOUGLAS

INTERVAL OF EIGHT MINUTES

ACT 3

SCENE I.—St. James's Park

Mabel Barcaldine MARDA VANNE
James Barcaldine NICHOLAS HANNEN
Ticket Collector PAUL GILL

SCENE II.—Theatreland

Mabel Barcaldine MARDA VANNE
James Barcaldine NICHOLAS HANNEN
Henry Delauney FRANK HARVEY
Compton Schloss . MILTON ROSMER

Play Produced by NICHOLAS HANNEN

CHARACTERS

JAMES BARCALDINE ; MABEL BARCALDINE ; HENRY DELAUNEY ; COMPTON SCHLOSS

Act I.

A SECRETARY
AN OLD GENTLEMAN
A SECOND OLD GENTLEMAN
A YOUTH
A REGISTRAR OF MARRIAGE
A REGISTER OFFICE CLERK
A REGISTER OFFICE JUNIOR
A REGISTER OFFICE CLEANER
A WOMAN

Act II.

FREDA BARCALDINE
STANLEY ROSEL
DOLLY SALES
PHILIP SALES
EDITH
CAPTAIN BOVILL
A WAITER
GODFREY MARVIN
A NURSE
A SECOND NURSE
DR. HINCHCLIFF
DR. SANGSTER
A CHARWOMAN

Act III.

A TYPIST
A CLERK
A REGISTRAR IN BANKRUPTCY
MR. CLINCHPOLE
MR. RUDYARD
MR. EVERITT
AN USHER

Act IV.

A PARK TICKET-COLLECTOR

SCENES

Act I.

SCENE I. THEATRELAND.
SCENE II. YEARS AGO AT EARL'S COURT EXHIBITION.
SCENE III. A REGISTER OFFICE.

Act II.

SCENE IV. BARCALDINE'S FLAT, YEARS LATER.
SCENE V. THE PLAZA CLUB, ON THE SAME NIGHT.
SCENE VI. BARCALDINE'S FLAT, AN HOUR LATER.
SCENE VII. BARCALDINE'S FLAT, A FEW MONTHS LATER.

Act III.

SCENE VIII. ROSEL'S OFFICE, SIX WEEKS AFTER.
SCENE IX. BANKRUPTCY BUILDINGS, THE SAME DAY.

Act IV.

SCENE X. ST. JAMES'S PARK.
SCENE XI. THEATRELAND.

ACT I

SCENE I

SCENE : *The office of Mr. Henry Delauney, a theatrical manager. The set is small and compact, in order to facilitate a quick change of scene. It is quite a charming office.*

When the curtain rises, MR. DELAUNEY *is seated at a desk ; a* LADY TYPIST *is sitting at another desk. She is taking a letter that he is dictating.* DELAUNEY *is a man of some years, rather elegantly dressed and with a certain distinction.*

DELAUNEY (*dictating*) : "Nevertheless, I shall hope to avail myself of your wife's services in a rôle more suited to her—to her strongly modulated personality."

SECRETARY : "Strongly modulated personality?"

DELAUNEY : No—"*perfectly* modulated personality." Whatever that may mean !

SECRETARY : "Perfectly modulated personality !"

DELAUNEY : Is she playing now ?

SECRETARY : Yes, she's in that thing at the Shaftesbury.

DELAUNEY : Are you sure ?

SECRETARY : I *saw* her in it.

DELAUNEY : Very well. "How delightful she is in the play at the Shaftesbury !"

SECRETARY : It isn't a play, Mr. Delauney, it's a revue !

DELAUNEY : Oh ! "How delightful she is in that thing at the Shaftesbury."

SECRETARY : "How delightful she is in that thing at the Shaftesbury." I *don't* think.

DELAUNEY : Rotten, was she ?

SECRETARY : Perfectly putrid, Mr. Delauney.

DELAUNEY : Yes, well, there you are. " With best of good wishes, sincerely yours." Now, I want you to send a copy of that cable from the Shuberts to Eaglestein ; get that off at once.

SECRETARY : What about those South African accounts ?

DELAUNEY : I'll take them this afternoon.

SECRETARY : But you've got the Entertainment Tax Committee meeting at five.

DELAUNEY : Well, we'll have to get through before, that's all.

[*Telephone rings on the* SECRETARY'S *desk.*

SECRETARY (*at telephone*) : Hullo ! Mr. Who ?

DELAUNEY : I'm not seeing anyone.

SECRETARY (*at telephone*) : Hold the line, please. It's Mr. Compton Schloss.

DELAUNEY : Who's he ?

SECRETARY : He's an author, isn't he ?

DELAUNEY : Oh, yes, of course, yes ! Ask him in. Why, of course.

SECRETARY : Show Mr. Schloss up, please.

DELAUNEY : Get those letters through. I'll sign them at once.

SECRETARY : Very well, Mr. Delauney.

[*The door opens L. and another clerk shows in* MR. SCHLOSS.

Clerk goes.

MR. SCHLOSS *looks something like an author, but not much. He registers thanks to the clerk who showed him in, smiles a childlike smile to the retiring*

LADY SECRETARY *and then prepares to keep his end up with* MR. DELAUNEY.

DELAUNEY : Come in, my dear fellow. I'm so very glad that you called to see me. (*He holds out his hand.*)

SCHLOSS (*shaking hands*) : How are you, Mr. Delauney ?

[SECRETARY *goes.*

You remember you said I was to pop in if I happened to be passing, so as I was passing I thought I'd just pop in.

DELAUNEY : That's right. I'm very glad you did. Now, sit down and let's have a little chat. I'm rather pressed by work this morning, but I can spare the time for that.

SCHLOSS : I've got a few things to do too ; but I just popped in.

DELAUNEY : What was that last thing of yours

SCHLOSS : Oh, which one do you mean ?

DELAUNEY : You know ; that last thing !

SCHLOSS : Oh, it—you mean " Snowdrift."

DELAUNEY : " Snowdrift," that was it.

SCHLOSS : You saw it ?

DELAUNEY : No, unfortunately, I never did. I missed it. My daughter saw it. She loved it.

SCHLOSS : I'm so glad.

DELAUNEY : She kept on about it.

SCHLOSS : Did she really ? I'm very glad.

DELAUNEY : You know, my dear Schloss, you don't work hard enough.

SCHLOSS : Can't ; brain gone !

DELAUNEY : Nonsense !

SCHLOSS : I can't think of anything I want to write.

DELAUNEY : My dear fellow, I know ! You *must* have the idea.

SCHLOSS : Yes, that's the trouble. One *must* have the idea. That's extraordinary true.

DELAUNEY : Er—have you ever tried your hand at musical comedy ?

SCHLOSS : I have not.

DELAUNEY : Well——

SCHLOSS : I would if I could, but I can't. I'd give anything to write all this sort of stuff that the public likes, but I can't. I'm simply unable to do it. Can't do it.

DELAUNEY : But don't you think——

SCHLOSS : I've tried. Complete wash-out. It's a great nuisance. It's an awful disaster, in fact, for me.

DELAUNEY : You mean——

SCHLOSS : I don't for a moment mean that I've got any exaggerated idea of my own efforts, but they happen to be the only things I seem to be able to write. Damn nuisance, as a matter of fact. Still——

DELAUNEY : Well, now. What do you think of this idea ? Don't be alarmed. It'll surprise you. A musical comedy plot without any music and very little comedy.

SCHLOSS : What !

DELAUNEY : I mean an ordinary musical comedy plot written by someone like yourself. With your own delightful dialogue and charming touches of sentiment.

SCHLOSS : Well, really, it's a remarkable idea.

DELAUNEY : You see its possibility ?

SCHLOSS : Oh, I do.

DELAUNEY : You see, *your* treatment would make up for the original rubbishy idea.

SCHLOSS : Well, really——

DELAUNEY : But you *do* see——

SCHLOSS : Oh, yes, I do.

DELAUNEY : Well, now, have a cigar.

SCHLOSS : No, thanks very much. I don't smoke them. I'll have one of these. (*Takes out some cigarettes and lights one.*)

DELAUNEY : Well, what about it ?

SCHLOSS : About this idea of yours ? Oh, I'd like to do it.

DELAUNEY : You would ?

SCHLOSS : I want to make some money.

DELAUNEY : My dear Schloss, we *all* want to make some money.

SCHLOSS : Yes, but I particularly do ; I'm extremely broke.

DELAUNEY : I know. All the same I'd like to think you really felt keen on my idea for itself.

SCHLOSS : Oh, I do. I think it's a most attractive idea. I think it's an awfully good idea.

DELAUNEY : You see, my dear fellow, they want to be taken out of themselves. People come to the theatre to be taken away from their own surroundings. They're not clever people ; they're stupid people. We've got to remember that. If they happen to be clever in ordinary life they like to be stupid when they go to the

theatre. Everything that's sad about a play must be the sort of sadness that can never happen to them. All the sort of sadness that can happen to them must be turned into sheer uproarious humour.

SCHLOSS : That may be so.

DELAUNEY : A wife beginning to hate her husband because he has fallen in love with the beautiful daughter of an Earl is a good situation. It can't ever happen to any wife in the audience. But a wife beginning to hate her husband because her boots let in water and he can't afford to buy her another pair is a damned rotten situation, because there's a whole heap of wives in the audience who know the feeling quite well.

SCHLOSS : That's perfectly true.

DELAUNEY : And do you blame them ? I don't.

SCHLOSS : Certainly not ; I agree with them entirely. At the same time I must confess that I rather prefer my own alternative. I like to believe that there is some sort of real romance in life. I like to think that life itself is like a well-constructed play.

DELAUNEY : Yes, but you know damned well it is not.

SCHLOSS : Pardon me, I——

DELAUNEY : Have you ever met anybody whose life was like a well-constructed play ?

SCHLOSS : I don't say I have, but it's a very nice ideal, all the same, and a perfectly possible one. It may be a sad life or even a tragic life, but there is no earthly reason why it should not conform to some definite pattern or shape.

DELAUNEY : I see. You want to take real people in real situations and squash them into some sort of romantic shape ?

SCHLOSS : Roughly speaking, yes.

DELAUNEY : In other words, you want to impose vour ideal of a purpose in life upon your audience.

SCHLOSS : And why not ?

DELAUNEY : Because it won't wash. The British public may be stupid, but it's not as stupid as all that. We may drink ourselves to death or we may even work ourselves to death, but we're none of us quite so mentally deficient as to spend our days in turning our lives into a well-constructed play. No, thank you.

SCHLOSS : Well, it seems a pity !

DELAUNEY : If you want to paint life as you see it, go ahead. I don't deal in that sort of work myself, but I admire it very considerably. Go ahead, my dear Schloss, and endeavour to attain a literary reputation. But don't, for the Lord's sake, go wasting your time and other people's money in trying to tell them that the *shape* of their lives is of more importance than their happiness or achievement.

SCHLOSS : But supposing it is ?

DELAUNEY : Have you ever met a man or a woman who cared two hoots about the shape of their lives ?

SCHLOSS : No ; that's why I think it's up to someone to remind them of it. They all forget, and I think it's a pity.

DELAUNEY : The late Charles Peace had a well-constructed life.

SCHLOSS : He had. And so had Cecil Rhodes and Queen Victoria. On the other hand, Richard Wagner's was a shocking jumble, and so was Robert Browning's.

DELAUNEY : What about Guy Fawkes ? Where does he come in ?

SCHLOSS : Of course, I know I may be an idiot, but I'm a sincere idiot.

[*Enter the* LADY SECRETARY.

DELAUNEY : Yes, what is it ?

SECRETARY : There's a Mr. and Mrs. Barcaldine have called.

DELAUNEY : Oh, hang. Ask them to wait. No, hold on a minute. (*To* SCHLOSS) Would you mind if I see these people in here ?

SCHLOSS : Why, of course. I'll be off——

DELAUNEY : No, no. I just want to try them. These are the *typical* sort of people who make up our theatre audience. I've taken their little place on the river for the summer. Quite nice ordinary people. I'd like to just try them. We'll just see.

SCHLOSS : Right-ho ; certainly. But I'm no good at this sort of thing.

DELAUNEY : Ask Mr. and Mrs. Barcaldine to come in, please.

[SECRETARY *goes*.

DELAUNEY : We'll just be perfectly ordinary.

SCHLOSS : Oh, certainly.

DELAUNEY : We don't do this half enough, believe me. We don't study our markets.

SCHLOSS : The worst of it is nobody is ever really what you call " typical and ordinary."

DELAUNEY : My dear chap, on the contrary, nearly everybody is typical and ordinary.

SCHLOSS : No, no.

DELAUNEY : Yes, yes.

[*Enter* SECRETARY, *showing in* MR. *and* MRS. BARCALDINE. BARCALDINE *is a pleasant-looking man who appears about forty-eight or fifty. His wife is a little younger. He is neatly dressed and is holding an umbrella and a bowler hat.* MRS. BARCALDINE *is wearing very simple attire, but she is not in the slightest degree dowdy. They both look pleasant people. Of course, all people look pleasant when they are trying to let a furnished house, but this is how they do look anyhow. They also seem a trifle weary, as most people do seem at that age, but they don't appear at all aware of the fact. It should be evident that the particular business they are concerned with at the moment is the letting of their house at a decent rental. This purpose achieved, then God will be in His heaven and all will be right with the world.*

The SECRETARY *goes out.*

DELAUNEY (*going forward*) : Ah, Mrs. Barcaldine, how do you do ? And Mr. Barcaldine ?

MABEL : How are you, Mr. Delauney ?

DELAUNEY : Let me introduce Mr. Compton Schloss to you.

[*Business.*

Mr. Schloss is one of our most distinguished authors. (*He coughs.*)

BARCALDINE (*nobly endeavouring to appear familiar with the name*) : Oh, yes, indeed.

DELAUNEY : I expect you remember his last play " Spendthrift ? "

SCHLOSS : " Snowdrift."

DELAUNEY : " Snowdrift."

MABEL : Really, indeed.

SCHLOSS : Isn't it a nice day ? I think it's an awfully nice day.

BARCALDINE : Very.

DELAUNEY : Now, Mrs. Barcaldine, will you sit down ? That's it. Barcaldine, you'll have a cigar or a cigarette ?

BARCALDINE : Oh, thank you.

[*Business.*

DELAUNEY : You needn't mind our friend being here.

BARCALDINE : Why, of course not ; I hope he doesn't object to——

DELAUNEY (*for* SCHLOSS's *benefit*) : Don't you mind about him.

SCHLOSS (*for* DELAUNEY's *benefit*) : No, no. I'm the fellow who's barged in, believe me. Don't you mind about me.

MABEL (*who retains a feminine interest in the theatre*) : Is anything of yours being done now, Mr. Slosh ?

SCHLOSS (*who has learnt to hate the question*) : Er—not in London. No. Not a single thing, not one. America ; Australia ; but not London. No.

BARCALDINE : My father used to know W. S. Gilbert many years ago.

SCHLOSS : Did he indeed ?

DELAUNEY : Well, now. Am I to have this house of yours ?

BARCALDINE (*laughing a little nervously*) : Well, we hope so, Mr. Delauney.

MABEL : I don't know whether Goddard and Smith sent you the list of plate and linen?

DELAUNEY : Oh, yes, they did. My daughter saw that.

MABEL : If, of course, there's not enough sheets and blankets, we'd agree to get all you'd require.

BARCALDINE : Enough for the two spare rooms.

DELAUNEY : That's splendid. Of course, we'd send a lot of stuff down. Er—my daughter said there was very little wardrobe room. You know, for packing away clothes.

MABEL : It's quite true. We're awfully badly off that way. We might——

BARCALDINE : We might obtain something.

DELAUNEY : You think you could——

MABEL : You see, I haven't a very extensive wardrobe myself and——

DELAUNEY : I wish my daughter could say the same. Well, now, fifteen guineas is more than I could afford. It's a delightful little house, but it's really quite small. We've seen several other similar places in the neighbourhood and they're all less, round about ten guineas.

MABEL : We've never——

DELAUNEY : I know. *Then*, but not now.

MABEL : Er——

BARCALDINE : What would you suggest?

DELAUNEY : Er—well, what I was saying ; ten guineas.

MABEL : Oh, but, Mr. Delauney, it wouldn't be worth our while.

BARCALDINE : Now, let's see. We say fifteen ; you say ten. Can't we——

DELAUNEY : Well, I'd go to twelve.

BARCALDINE : As a matter of fact, Mr. Delauney, we couldn't afford to live in the place the rest of the year if it wasn't for the summer let.

[*A pause.*

DELAUNEY : I'll tell you what I'll do. Fifty pounds a month. A hundred and fifty for the three months. That's roughly twelve-ten a week.

MABEL (*looking round at her husband*) : Very well, Mr. Delauney.

DELAUNEY : Is that perfectly satisfactory ?

MABEL : Yes, quite.

BARCALDINE : Quite satisfactory, thank you.

[*As a matter of fact it is very satisfactory indeed.*

DELAUNEY : Good business ! It's really a delightful little place, Schloss ; you'd love it.

SCHLOSS : Where is it ?

BARCALDINE : Just beyond Bourne End.

SCHLOSS : Oh, yes.

DELAUNEY : It's got an excellent garage.

BARCALDINE : We've never kept a car, but we find that the garage makes all the difference for letting the place.

SCHLOSS : Oh, it would.

DELAUNEY : No good to me without a garage. By the way, Mrs. Barcaldine, if you and your husband would care to see any of my productions I'd be most happy to place a box at your disposal.

MABEL : I'd love to, Mr. Delauney. How very kind of you.

BARCALDINE : It's really very good of you, Mr. Delauney.

DELAUNEY : We're pretty busy at the moment, I'm thankful to say. But we'll manage to find a box for you.

BARCALDINE : Er—we'll be in London on Friday. Just that one night.

MABEL : We're going to see a cottage at Littlehampton, but we're going to stay in London that night.

DELAUNEY : Friday evening, then ; I've only three shows on at the moment.

[SCHLOSS *coughs.*

BARCALDINE (*with admiration*) : What a responsibility !

DELAUNEY : It is rather. Now, what would you prefer ? Would you care to see Muriel Hawkins in " Putrefaction " ? One of the greatest of our English actresses ; don't you think so, Schloss ?

SCHLOSS : Er—one of them.

MABEL : I think she's lovely.

DELAUNEY : Or would you like to see " Soda and Water " ? One of the cleverest things we've had for years, isn't it, Schloss ?

SCHLOSS : I've not seen it.

DELAUNEY : Unfortunately, it's too good for the public, I'm afraid.

SCHLOSS : I must go and see it.

MABEL : I like clever plays.

BARCALDINE : It's always a treat to see a clever play.

DELAUNEY : Or would you like to go to "The Cinderella Princess" with Dailia Day and Billy Benyon and Jimmy Rivers and Bobby Byfleet and all the rest? The waterfall in the hotel lounge at Deauville is a wonderful scene, and carnival night in Sloane Square is full of imagination.

MABEL : I love Dailia Day. I think she's so sweet.

BARCALDINE : I like Billy Benyon. He always makes me laugh. He's a public-school boy, isn't he?

DELAUNEY (*with pride*) : That's quite right.

SCHLOSS : Now, Jimmy Rivers——

DELAUNEY : Jimmy's just the same as ever.

MABEL : He's always just the same.

DELAUNEY : Just the same.

MABEL : Always the same.

SCHLOSS : Just exactly——

BARCALDINE : Always——

MABEL : He must be getting on.

DELAUNEY : Oh, he is.

BARCALDINE : Must be.

MABEL : But always just the same.

DELAUNEY : Now, which would you like to go to on Friday evening?

SCHLOSS : Whichever you like.

MABEL : Really, it's so hard to say. They're all so attractive.

BARCALDINE : They are.

DELAUNEY : Please yourselves, mind.

MABEL (*turning to her husband*) : Which do you think?

BARCALDINE : No, it's just which *you'd* like, dear.

MABEL : I don't know—I think I'd sooner see—do you know, I think we'd thoroughly enjoy "The Cinderella Princess."

DELAUNEY : Splendid.

MABEL : Wouldn't *you*, dear ?

BARCALDINE : I should immensely.

DELAUNEY : Well, that's that.

SCHLOSS : That's very interesting.

DELAUNEY : Yes ; now we're very intrigued in this choice of yours.

MABEL (*smiling*) : Really ?

BARCALDINE : Well, you see——

DELAUNEY : Now you said you both liked clever plays, and although "The Cinderella Princess" has twenty-seven authors it could not be called exactly "clever" in the strict sense of the word.

MABEL : I know——

DELAUNEY : Again, you both admire Muriel Hawkins.

SCHLOSS : Who is one of our greatest actresses.

DELAUNEY : All the same, when it comes to the point, you prefer "The Cinderella Princess."

MABEL : Well, you see——

BARCALDINE : You see, we go to the theatre so seldom.

MABEL : So very seldom.

DELAUNEY : That's hardly an explanation, is it ? Doesn't a clever play entertain you ? Something that deals with reality, with life ?

BARCALDINE : Oh, yes, it does indeed.

DELAUNEY : Something that makes you think.

SCHLOSS : Perhaps, like so many of us, you get enough of reality.

BARCALDINE : Oh, I don't know.

MABEL : We like sad things. We both weep copiously.

SCHLOSS : Yes, but that sort of sadness doesn't mean reality.

MABEL : I hate those horrid, gloomy, morbid things.

SCHLOSS : You like romance ; no matter how simple ; because it recalls the romance that you like to feel has shaped itself in your own lives.

BARCALDINE : I don't know that there's much romance in our lives. (*With the shadow of a grin.*)

DELAUNEY : Don't say that or he'll hurl something at you.

MABEL : Don't be silly, Mr. Slosh. What do you *expect* from us ? I've got a very nice husband ; that's the chief thing.

BARCALDINE : And I've got quite a tolerable wife as wives go.

SCHLOSS : *That* is romance.

MABEL : Oh, it *isn't*, Mr. Slosh.

BARCALDINE : I don't know where the romance comes in. I'm an architect by profession. I deal a bit in house property. Not much romance in that sort of business.

DELAUNEY : Nevertheless, a contented, ordered, happy existence.

BARCALDINE : I suppose we ought not to complain.

SCHLOSS : An untroubled existence is no doubt something to be thankful for.

BARCALDINE : We've had plenty to worry us.

DELAUNEY : Who hasn't ?

MABEL : That's what I say.

SCHLOSS : I don't mean ordinary business worries.

MABEL : He means romantic worries.

BARCALDINE : Ordinary business worries are good enough for me.

DELAUNEY : I should think so.

MABEL : Then we've only had one child and we lost her.

DELAUNEY : Really ? I'm sorry.

BARCALDINE : It's not been all roses for us or for anyone else.

SCHLOSS : Yes, indeed.

BARCALDINE : Still——

SCHLOSS : Have you been married long ?

BARCALDINE : About twenty-six years.

SCHLOSS : Indeed.

MABEL : We were married at a register office.

DELAUNEY : So was I.

SCHLOSS : Tell me, Mr. Barcaldine ; in looking back on your life, don't you derive a sense and spirit of fulfilment in discerning some definite design or pattern in your career ?

DELAUNEY : Now he's off ! Don't answer him.

BARCALDINE : I'm afraid I don't. I'm not much of a character for you, Mr. Schloss. (*Smiling broadly.*)

MABEL (*to her husband*) : Never mind, we've always managed to pay the butcher and the baker, haven't we ?

BARCALDINE : Touch wood.

DELAUNEY : That's the chief thing.

BARCALDINE : You see, you gentlemen are different, but when we go to a theatre, my wife and I, we like plenty of light and bustle and excitement and all sorts of passions and hates, just because our own lives, like most other people's, are unaware of all these things.

SCHLOSS : Yes, exactly.

DELAUNEY : I've always said so.

BARCALDINE : I believe that only the editors of newspapers can realise how dull the lives of forty million people must be.

MABEL : You see, it's quite different with you. You are Bohemians.

SCHLOSS : I hope not.

DELAUNEY : Bohemian is the term used in obituary notices for cirrhosis of the liver.

BARCALDINE : Really ?

MABEL : We didn't know. At any rate, your lives are not so settled and fixed as ours are.

DELAUNEY : They most certainly are not.

SCHLOSS : We sometimes lie awake at night and dream of such a state.

BARCALDINE : So there you are ! We ought, none of us, to complain really, if you think of it. So long as we never get bitter, we're pulling our weight.

DELAUNEY : You've hit it there.

BARCALDINE : That's how I look at it. That's how we look at it, my wife and I.

MABEL : It's true.

SCHLOSS : No dreams to dream.

BARCALDINE : Good Lord, sir ! Anyone would imagine, to hear you talk, people had nothing else to do but dream dreams and see visions.

DELAUNEY : A most horrible idea !

BARCALDINE : Is there any beauty, romance, or drama in going through the hoop ? Is there ?

SCHLOSS and DELAUNEY : No !

BARCALDINE : Is there any grace or charm to be found in one long round of doctors, duns, and God knows what ?

SCHLOSS : No.

DELAUNEY : I think, my dear Schloss, we must truly admit that there can be no answer to that.

SCHLOSS : My dear Mr. Delauney.

[*Slow curtain.*

I am unfortunately compelled to agree.

SCENE II

SCENE : *Earl's Court Exhibition ; years ago.*

Two GROTESQUE OLD GENTLEMEN *sitting under a tree.*

1ST GROTESQUE : Any rate, it's a damned sight better'n going to theatre.

2ND GROTESQUE : Absolutely.

[*They talk quite slowly and profoundly.*

1ST G : Cremorne.

2ND G. : Exactly.

1ST G. : Remember it ?

2ND G. : Rather.

1ST G. : Whistler and all that lot.

2ND G. : Rather !

1ST G. : That's all gone by.

2ND G. : Absolutely.

1ST G. : Very different.

2ND G. : Absolutely. Rather.

1ST G. : Damned fine woman.

2ND G. : Where ? (*Taking interest.*)

1ST G. : What ?

2ND G. : Damned fine woman ?

1ST G. : Cremorne.

2ND G. : Oh, yes, rather. Absolutely.

1ST G. : Still, I like to see all these youngsters enjoying 'emselves. Little milliners and that sort. Very good thing. Like to see 'em spooning. Ha, ha ! God bless my soul !

2ND G. : Ha, ha !

1ST G. : Well, well. Shall we be on the move ? Bit chilly.

2ND G. : Yes, yes, certainly.

1ST G. : We'll pick up a hansom at the entrance down the bottom here. I'll drop you.

2ND G. : All right.

1ST G. : Want my arm?

2ND G. : Thank you.

1ST G. : Goin' to rain. (*Looking up.*)

2ND G. : Absolutely.

1ST G. : Confounded nuisance! We'll get wet.

2ND G. : We will.

1ST G. : Better hold on a moment.

[*They stand under the trees.*)
This is all right.

[*A* YOUNG MAN *appears up at the back. He turns round and calls off.*

YOUNG MAN : Here we are. Let's get under the trees, Mabel. Here!

[*A* GIRL *comes running on from the back and dashes straight for the tree.*

MABEL : Goodness! It's not half coming down!

1ST G. : Come in, my dear, you'll get wet.

MABEL : I'm all right, thanks.

YOUNG MAN : We're all right.

MABEL : There now! I've gone and left my scarf.

YOUNG MAN : On the seat?

MABEL : Must have done.

YOUNG MAN : I'll get it.

MABEL : Wait till it stops.

YOUNG MAN : It's stopping.

MABEL : Hope nobody's taken it.

YOUNG MAN : Not they!

MABEL : Expect they will.

[*Another young man*—BARCALDINE—*holding up an umbrella, has come on from the opposite back of the stage. Putting down his umbrella, he has gone under the tree. Behind it from the audience, the other side of the two* OLD GENTLEMEN.

YOUNG MAN : P'raps I'd better get it now.

MABEL : You don't want to get wet.

YOUNG MAN : I don't mind.

MABEL : I don't want to lose it.

YOUNG MAN : It'll stop in half a minute.

1ST G. : I think it's cleared off. Too many people crowding round this tree. Shall we have a shot at it ?

2ND G. : Yes, rather.

1ST G. : Take my arm.

2ND G. : Thank you.

[*They begin to move off.*

1ST G. (*as they go*) : Not raining much now.

2ND G. : No, it's not raining now.

1ST G. : We're all right now.

[*They disappear.*

YOUNG MAN : Cheek of those two old toffs talking to you !

MABEL : Oh, shut up.

YOUNG MAN : Wot ?

MABEL : I hate that word "toff." It's a beastly word. What do you want to keep on saying it for ?

YOUNG MAN : All right. I'm sorry. You stick here, Mabel, and I'll fetch that scarf.

MABEL : I'll come too.

YOUNG MAN : No ; you stay where you are. It's dribbling still a bit.

MABEL : You know where we were sitting ?

YOUNG MAN (*moving off*) : Rather. Shan't be half a mo'.

[*He runs off.*

The GIRL *brushes her sleeves and pulls at her collar. The young man,* BARCALDINE, *behind the tree comes round, putting up his umbrella and looking up at the sky. He observes the* GIRL, *does so twice, and then looks again at the sky. It must be remembered that they are both very young.*

BARCALDINE : It's still raining.

MABEL : I beg your pardon.

BARCALDINE (*closing his umbrella and moving to the tree*) : It's silly to get wet.

MABEL : It is rather.

BARCALDINE : If—if my umbrella's any use to you, I'll be very pleased——

MABEL : Oh, it's all right, thank you so much. My friend will look after me.

BARCALDINE : Oh, I see ; I beg your pardon.

MABEL : He's gone to get my scarf. I left it by the bandstand.

BARCALDINE : I see.

[*A pause.*

MABEL : This rain's beastly, isn't it ?

BARCALDINE : It is, isn't it ?

MABEL : I hope it's going to stop.

BARCALDINE : I expect it will.

MABEL : I hope he's found my scarf.

BARCALDINE : Yes.

MABEL : He'll be back in a minute.

[*A pause.*

BARCALDINE : Look here—I hope you didn't mind my speaking to you.

MABEL : Why should I ?

BARCALDINE : Exactly.

[*A pause.*

MABEL : I think I'd better find my friend.

BARCALDINE : No, no. I'll be off.

MABEL : I didn't mean that.

BARCALDINE : Really ?

MABEL : Of course not.

BARCALDINE : I say. I'd so much like to think we knew each other.

MABEL : Don't be silly.

BARCALDINE : I suppose it can't be helped.

MABEL : If you say so——

BARCALDINE : What d'you mean ?

MABEL : I don't know.

BARCALDINE : Well.

MABEL : What's your name ? I'll say you're a friend of mine.

BARCALDINE : My name's Barcaldine. Will you really say that ?

MABEL : What a pretty name. I say, you *must* think me a fool.

BARCALDINE : I don't—I don't——

MABEL : You've got a funny face.

BARCALDINE : I can't help my face.

MABEL : Is that your face ?

BARCALDINE : Is it horrible ?

MABEL : No, I like it.

[*Re-enter the first* YOUNG MAN.

Look out ! Hullo, Fred, have you got it ? Look, this is Mr. Barcaldine, a friend of Miss Taylor's. He just came up.

YOUNG MAN : How do you do ?

BARCALDINE : How d'you do ?

MABEL : Look here, Fred, be a dear. Do go and get me some chocolate walnuts at that Hungarian stall. You know ; the ones you got the other night.

YOUNG MAN : But it's stopped raining.

MABEL : I know ; but it may begin again. And I would so like some.

YOUNG MAN : But it's right the other side of the water-chute.

MABEL : Well, if you don't want to——

YOUNG MAN : Well——

MABEL : And Mr. Barcaldine has something to tell me about Miss Taylor.

YOUNG MAN : Oh, well——

MABEL : There's a dear.

BARCALDINE : I say ; this seems rotten.

YOUNG MAN : It's all right. Will you be here ?

MABEL : Yes, we'll wait here till you come back.

BARCALDINE : Can't I——

YOUNG MAN : No, it's all right.

MABEL : You *are* a dear. You don't mind ?

YOUNG MAN : 'Course I don't. Right-ho.

[*Off he goes.*

BARCALDINE : I say !

MABEL : Shut up ; let's sit down.

BARCALDINE : Shall we ? It's stopped raining.

MABEL : I wonder how long he'll be.

BARCALDINE : It's the further side, isn't it ?

MABEL : I don't care.

[*They sit down.*

BARCALDINE : Look here ! I say !

MABEL : Well ?

BARCALDINE : I don't know.

MABEL : Funny face.

BARCALDINE : Look here ; I think you are perfectly ripping ; I do really.

MABEL : Do you ?

BARCALDINE : I do. I think it's awfully nice of you to talk to me.

MABEL : Oh, shut up ! (*She says this softly.*)

BARCALDINE : What ?

MABEL : I don't know. You've got a nice voice. Oh, well——

BARCALDINE : I say, we must meet. Can't we meet here ?

MABEL : I can meet you on Friday here.

BARCALDINE : Where ?

MABEL : How can I let you know ?

BARCALDINE : I'm at Milman Street, near Bedford Square.

MABEL : Write it down.

BARCALDINE (*getting out a bit of paper and a pencil*) : Yes. What will find you ?

MABEL : I'm at forty-five, Fosdyke Mansions, Baron's Court. Write it down.

BARCALDINE : Forty-five, Fosdyke Mansions.

MABEL : Baron's Court. I'm staying there with a girl and her sister.

BARCALDINE : Oh, yes. (*Handing it her*) That's my address.

MABEL : What is it ? Rooms ?

BARCALDINE : Yes. I'm by myself in London. I'm with my uncle in his office. He's a chartered accountant. I come from Norfolk.

MABEL : I come from Dorset. My father's a chemist at Lyme Regis.

BARCALDINE : Really !

MABEL : I'm at Morgan and Paul's, the estate agents at Hanover Square.

BARCALDINE : Are you ? I think you're lovely.

MABEL : I hate the fellows I meet.

BARCALDINE : Do you really ?

MABEL : Yes, I hate them.

BARCALDINE : Do you hate me ?

MABEL : Of course I don't. (*She takes off her gloves.*)

BARCALDINE : Why not ?

MABEL : You're a silly little boy.

BARCALDINE : No, I'm not. What's your name ?

MABEL : Mabel Wingrove.

BARCALDINE : It's a sweet name.

MABEL : No, it's a rotten name.

BARCALDINE : It's a lovely name.

MABEL : I like your eyes.

BARCALDINE : You don't.

MABEL : Yes, I do ! I love them.

BARCALDINE : Dear !

MABEL : Look here. My friends are going to Croydon on Thursday. I'll be all alone.

BARCALDINE : Will you ?

MABEL : Come and have some tea ?

BARCALDINE : Where ?

MABEL : At the flat ; forty-five, Fosdyke Mansions. It's a very small flat.

BARCALDINE : Really ?

MABEL : Say six o'clock.

BARCALDINE : I'd like to very much.

MABEL : They won't know.

BARCALDINE : Who ?

MABEL : My friends.

BARCALDINE : Would they mind ?

MABEL : I should say so. They're awful.

BARCALDINE : How ?

MABEL : You know ; old-fashioned.

BARCALDINE : Yes, I know the sort of thing.

MABEL : Thursday, mind.

BARCALDINE : I shan't forget.

MABEL (*looking at the bit of paper*) : Sixty-three, Milman Street. I'll let you know if I've got to put you off.

BARCALDINE : Can I write to you to-night ?

MABEL : What for ?

BARCALDINE : I'd like to.

MABEL (*holding his hand*) : You're funny. You're not really good-looking, are you ?

BARCALDINE : Some girls think so.

MABEL : No, they don't. Would you like me to kiss you ?

BARCALDINE : Yes, I should.

MABEL : Anybody see us ?

BARCALDINE : No, no.

[*She lets go his hand and, getting hold of his shoulder, she pulls him towards her and kisses him on the mouth.*

MABEL : There.

BARCALDINE : I say——

MABEL (*getting up*) : It's stopped altogether now. (*Moving away.*)

BARCALDINE : Has it really ?

MABEL : Almost.

BARCALDINE : Not quite though.

MABEL : Here he comes.

BARCALDINE : Blow ! Why not dash off ? Let's get off. Make up some excuse to-morrow.

MABEL : Shall we ?

BARCALDINE : Why not ? I'll see you home.

MABEL : No, it's beastly mean.

BARCALDINE : It isn't.

MABEL : No, it would be much too mean. It's a shame. Get off now, before he comes.

BARCALDINE : You'd sooner I did ?

MABEL : Yes, please, dear. No, no.

BARCALDINE (*he kisses her hand*) : Thursday. I'll write to-night.

MABEL : All right. Get along now.

[*He takes off his hat ; then he goes off. They are both conscious of a certain haste. It is, in a way, an ungraceful conclusion to such a seraphic moment.*

BARCALDINE *goes.*

MABEL *puts on her gloves quite quickly.*

The YOUNG MAN *comes in.*

MABEL : Hullo ; there you are. What a shame ! Thank you so much. I love these things. Let's be off now, shall we ? He's gone ; had to join the people he was with.

YOUNG MAN : Who was he ?

MABEL : I told you. He's a friend of Miss Taylor's. Hooray ! It isn't raining. Isn't it lovely ?

YOUNG MAN (*as they begin to go off*) : Yes. It's all right now.

[*They go down towards the back of the scene.*

MABEL : I'm so glad, aren't you ?

YOUNG MAN : What ?

MABEL : Er—glad it isn't raining.

[*The* YOUNG MAN *is quite pleased she is so glad it isn't raining.*

CURTAIN

SCENE : *A register office. This is winter. This register office must not be imaginable in any summer. It is cold perpetually. The furniture is quite adequate and municipal, but the lighting is well under the weather. Three desks are in a row at the back, facing the audience. The centre desk is more distinguished and has a leather chair. Behind, against the flat R., is a very high safe. On the other side of back L. is a window. Through the window comes the thick amber gloom of an obscene metropolitan fog. There is a door down R. and another door up L. A municipal fire-grate in right flat, in which a municipal fire is burning. On the opposite side, L., a long wooden bench runs along the whole length in front of flat almost up to the door L. There is a little holly berry hung about the place. There must be sufficient of this holly for the audience to notice it. The door down R. is the public door ; the one up L. is private.*

A CHARWOMAN *with a pail of water is commencing to wash the stones at the bottom of the main door down R.*

A SMALL YOUTH, *a sort of junior clerk, comes in from private door with some papers and a large book, which he places on the centre desk.*

YOUTH : What you doing ? You can't do that. We got a marriage.

WOMAN : Wen ?

YOUTH : Now. Ten-fifteen.

WOMAN : Well, I didn't know.

YOUTH : It's on the board.

WOMAN : Well, I didn't know. Funny sort of

day to choose. 'Ow many more, I wonder? (*Moving up.*)

YOUTH : This is the only one.

[*A* LARGE MAN *of unteetotal aspect comes in from door down R.*

MAN : Wot's all this! Off you get.

WOMAN : Awl right, sir. I didn't know.

[*She moves out by the same door.*

MAN : It's comin' up, isn't it? It's thick as mud down the Vauxhall Bridge Road. (*Crossing to door L.*)

YOUTH : Clear as anything wen I got in at Belsize Park.

MAN : Wot time?

YOUTH : Only about an hour and a half ago.

MAN : Thick down 'ere then.

YOUTH : Was it?

MAN : Setting in all round now. 'Ere, put those time sheets on the day file.

[*He crosses down again and goes off through door down R.*

The YOUTH *does something with the papers on the desk.*

Almost immediately the MAN *comes on to the stage again, holding the door open.*

MAN (*as if repeating a formula*) : Will you be good enough to come this way?

[MABEL *comes in, followed by* BARCALDINE. MABEL *has got an ostensibly new hat on, but it is quite nice and quiet. She is also quite neatly shod. She looks very well, except for her big coat, which is a bit off.* BARCALDINE *hasn't got a stick or umbrella. He carries a bowler hat.*

Not the sort of weather we want for Christmas, is it?

MABEL : No, it's not.

BARCALDINE : No, it isn't.

MAN : Now ; will you kindly take a seat over there. Thank you.

[*They go over and sit down on the bench.*

You've got your witnesses?

BARCALDINE : No ; ought we to?

MAN : You must have witnesses to the marriage.

BARCALDINE : I didn't know that.

MABEL : What can we do?

MAN : Didn't you read the instructions?

BARCALDINE : I didn't know.

MAN : It's all right. I'll see wot can be done. (*To* YOUTH) Give 'em the books.

[*He goes off again through the main door.*

The YOUTH *comes down and hands them two little open books.*

YOUTH (*speaking to a formula*) : Will you kindly glance through the procedure herein contained? The answers that you make before the registrar are printed in italics.

BARCALDINE : Thank you very much.

MABEL : Thank you.

YOUTH : You have the ring?

MABEL and BARCALDINE : Yes.

[*The* YOUTH *goes up.*

They both study their little books anxiously.

BARCALDINE : We've got to say these answers.

MABEL : I didn't know we'd got to do this.

BARCALDINE : He says this to you and then this to me. (*Pointing.*)

MABEL : It's religious, isn't it ? It's rather nice.

BARCALDINE : Yes.

[*A pause.*

MABEL : Just look at the fog.

BARCALDINE : Yes. You all right, Mabel ?

MABEL : Yes, dear. (*She pats his arm with the hand that is farthest from him.*) Are you ?

BARCALDINE : Yes—look at George Willy.

[*Indicating the* YOUTH, *who has settled down at the further desk.*

MABEL : Shut up.

BARCALDINE : Shan't.

MABEL : Jim.

BARCALDINE : Yes ?

MABEL : Are you glad ?

BARCALDINE : I should think I was.

[*Enter the* MAN *again, who crosses over to them.*

MAN : It's all right. I have procured your witnesses.

BARCALDINE : Oh, thank you very much.

[*The* MAN *goes up to the desk.*

MABEL : You'll have to give them something, Jim. Have you got enough ?

[*He secretly gets out some money ; silver and bronze. They both become darkly furtive.*

BARCALDINE : I don't know. Silver ?

MABEL : Better give each witness half a crown.

BARCALDINE : I've only got three. I want these two.

MABEL : I've got some. (*Fumbling with a little purse.*) Half a crown's plenty. Got the five shillings for the man?

BARCALDINE : Yes ; this is it.

MABEL : Have these sixpences as well, in case. (*Putting them into his hand.*)

[*The* CHARWOMAN, *who has put a hat on, followed by a stout and somewhat younger* WOMAN, *comes on through door down R. They cross over to the bench and seat themselves down some way above the* OTHER TWO. *This is done in a manner that suggests experience.*

MABEL (*with a touch of awe*) : They're the witnesses.

[*The door opens and the* REGISTRAR *comes in.*

THE MAN *and the* YOUTH *both stand up by their desks. So do the* CHARWOMAN *and her* PARTNER, *then* MABEL *and* JIM.

The REGISTRAR *is a nicely dressed man in a morning coat. He has a small black moustache. He walks straight to his desk. Bows to* MABEL *and* JIM, *gives them a very kind smile and then sits down.*

Everybody remains standing ; then the fat MAN *comes forward. He has to beckon them several times to get them in the exact position. The* REGISTRAR *alone remains seated.*

REGISTRAR (*he has a charming voice and manner. None the less he permeates the place with a spirit of real solemnity from the moment he speaks*) : Your name is James Wilfred Barcaldine?

BARCALDINE : Yes.

REGISTRAR : You are aged twenty-one ?

BARCALDINE : Yes.

REGISTRAR : A bachelor ?

BARCALDINE : Yes.

REGISTRAR : You describe yourself as a secretary.

BARCALDINE : Yes.

REGISTRAR : Secretary is rather indefinite.

BARCALDINE : Well, sir ; I'm acting as secretary to my uncle, who's a chartered accountant, but I think I'm going to be an architect.

REGISTRAR : Very well. Your address is seven, Livendale Terrace, Addison Road ?

BARCALDINE : Yes.

REGISTRAR : You are the son of Wilfred Barcaldine of "Ellerslie," Salter's Hill, near Norwich, architect and surveyor ?

BARCALDINE : Yes.

[*Pause.*

REGISTRAR : Your name is Mabel Wingrove ?

MABEL : Yes.

REGISTRAR : Your age is nineteen years ?

MABEL : Yes.

REGISTRAR : You are a spinster ?

MABEL : Yes.

REGISTRAR : You describe yourself as an invoice clerk ?

MABEL : Yes.

REGISTRAR : Your address is forty-five, Fosdyke Mansions, Baron's Court ?

MABEL : Yes.

REGISTRAR : You are the daughter of Harold Wingrove, The Forberry, Lyme Regis, chemist?

MABEL : Yes.

REGISTRAR : Thank you. You will be good enough to look over the copies of your declarations and sign your names as indicated.

[*The large* MAN *turns round a very immense kind of ledger and gives* MABEL *a pen to sign her name. She then passes it on to* BARCALDINE, *who follows suit. Meanwhile, the* YOUTH *has passed up another document to the* REGISTRAR, *which he proceeds to deal with.*

MAN (*in a whisper*) : Now, please step back a little. (*He presses them back a couple of feet.*)

[*The* REGISTRAR *stands up, and then comes round to the front of his desk facing them. He has a small book in his hand which he makes no use of.*

REGISTRAR (*speaking to* MABEL) : I call upon you to declare before me, the appointed Superintendent Registrar of this Parish, that you know of no lawful impediment to this contract of marriage.

[*A pause.*

I, Mabel Wingrove——

MABEL : I, Mabel Wingrove——

REGISTRAR : Do solemnly swear——

MABEL : Do solemnly swear——

REGISTRAR : That I know of no lawful impediment to this contract of marriage——

MABEL : That I know of no lawful impediment to this contract of marriage.

REGISTRAR (*turning*) : I, James Wilfred Barcaldine——

BARCALDINE : I, James Wilfred Barcaldine, do solemnly swear that I know of no lawful impediment to this contract of marriage.

REGISTRAR : Now, will you place the ring on her finger, please.

[BARCALDINE *does so.*

Now, say : I take this woman, Mabel Wingrove, to be my lawful wedded wife.

BARCALDINE (*his voice has a little tremble*) : I take this woman, Mabel Wingrove, to be my lawful wedded wife.

REGISTRAR : I take this man——

MABEL : I take this man——

REGISTRAR : James Wilfred Barcaldine——

MABEL (*very like a little child's voice*) : James Wilfred Barcaldine——

REGISTRAR : To be my lawful wedded husband——

MABEL : To be my lawful wedded husband. (*It is scarcely heard.*)

[*There is a little pause.*

REGISTRAR : Thank you. (*He bows to them both with the kindest little smile and then goes back to his desk.*

[*The* CHARWOMAN, *who is still the old hand, goes up to stick her name down, followed by the* OTHER WOMAN.

MAN : Now, if you just wait down there we'll have the certificate in half a minute.

[*They come down stage. They smile to each other but say nothing. The two* WITNESSES, *having signed their names, have retired. They are immediately above* MABEL *and* JIM.

MABEL (*in a whisper*) : Better thank 'em, Jim, and give 'em the money.

BARCALDINE : Yes ; I think I'd better give the other the ten shillings——

MABEL : Do you, Jim ?

BARCALDINE : Yes, I think I'd better.

MABEL : Go up now.

[*He goes gingerly up, rather like walking on hot bricks. The two* LADIES *insist on shaking hands with him and are quite satisfied with their tips. He comes straight back to* MABEL.

BARCALDINE (*whispering*) : They wish you very good luck, they said.

MABEL : Did they ? Was it all right ?

BARCALDINE : Yes.

[*A pause.*

MABEL : It was nice, wasn't it ?

BARCALDINE : Yes, it was.

[*The* REGISTRAR *gets up. They look round. He gives them a friendly nod and goes off by door up L.*

The stout MAN *goes to desk and then comes down to them, putting a folded paper in an envelope.*

MAN : Here is the marriage certificate.

[JIM *holds out his hand.*

No, this is given to the lady. Here you are, Mrs. Barcaldine. Don't lose it. I hope you will both have a very happy and prosperous married life.

BOTH : Thank you very much.

[*He leads them towards the door. They turn round and nod to the two* WOMEN.

CHARWOMAN : Good luck, ma'am.

2ND WOMAN : Good luck.

MAN (*at door*) : This way, please.

[*Goes out.*

MABEL : Take this, Jim. (*Meaning envelope.*)

BARCALDINE : No, you must keep it.

MABEL : I don't want to. I want you to keep it.

BARCALDINE : All right. (*Takes it.*) Come along.

MABEL : Have the money in your hand, Jim.

[*She gets hold of his arm as they go out.*

The CHARWOMAN *goes slowly across towards door, followed by the* OTHER WOMAN.

2ND WOMAN : Let 'em get off first.

CHARWOMAN : The 'appy pair then left for the South of Frauwnce.

2ND WOMAN : Didn't think much of 'er Burberry.

CHARWOMAN : Too young.

2ND WOMAN : P'raps they 'ad to.

CHARWOMAN : I expect. (*She opens the door.*)

2ND WOMAN : Gawd's truth. It's thicker than ever.

YOUTH : Coming down? (*He switches out the remaining lights from a board near the door.*)

[CHARWOMAN *starts scrubbing—other exit.*

(*Following them out*) My word. Look at it.

[YOUTH *goes. He is heard locking the door outside.*

There is no light except a faint glimmer from the fire and the thick yellow gloom through the window.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE IV

SCENE : *Barcaldine's flat.*

A well-furnished flat with symptoms of quite decent taste. The whole thing is quite simple, without any suggestion of ostentation. There is a large door in the back, opening on to a hall. The hall door of the flat shows on to the left of this hall. There is another door at the back of the hall through which the maid-servant comes, so it will be presumed to be the kitchen. On the right of the hall is another door, and on the left of the hall is another door which is scarcely seen from the front. The windows are on the right of the set, which is supposed to be a reception-room, so to speak. There is a door in flat, left, which goes into the dining-room of the flat.

When the curtain rises, FREDA BARCALDINE, *Barcaldine's daughter, is L. She is a pretty girl of about nineteen or twenty. She is wearing a sort of blue overall which gives her a very neat appearance. She is holding a carpet-sweeping apparatus, or rather, pulling it along the floor. The hall door opens and* BARCALDINE *comes in. He is wearing an overcoat and a bowler hat and has gloves and an umbrella. He proceeds to take his overcoat off and hang it on a stand which is against the back flat in the hall. He has filled out just a trifle. He has a small black moustache. There is just the slightest touch of grey in his hair.*

FREDA (*who is stooping over the machine which has fulfilled its well-known function of going wrong*) : That you, father ?

JIM (*speaking from the hall*) : Yes, dear. Any telephone calls ?

FREDA : Only the electric light people !

JIM (*coming in. He has got an evening newspaper wrapped up*) : Where's your mother ?

FREDA : In the kitchen. Any luck, father ?

JIM : Not so as you'd notice it.

FREDA : What a shame !

JIM : What are you trying to do ?

FREDA : Trying to make the wheels go round.

[MABEL BARCALDINE'S *voice is heard from the kitchen.*

MABEL : Is that you, Jim ?

JIM : Yes, dear.

[*She appears. She hasn't lost her looks. Although engaged in household work, she is not untidy. She has the same slick appearance as her daughter.*

MABEL : Do you want that iron, Freda ?

FREDA (*beginning to dash off*) : Good Lord, I forgot all about it !

MABEL : Well, don't leave that thing behind.

[FREDA *turns back and carts off the sweeper.*
MABEL *goes up to her husband and puts her hand on his shoulder and kisses him.*

Any luck, Jim ?

JIM : Not so as you'd notice it !

MABEL : What about the Glasgow people ?

JIM : Haven't heard yet. (*Fills pipe.*)

MABEL : What a shame !

JIM : As a matter of fact we don't expect to hear yet awhile. Not for a day or two.

MABEL : Oh, well, that's good, isn't it ?

JIM : Oh, yes. I'm not worrying about them yet. Rosel has been at us again !

MABEL : Beast !

JIM : I told him off.

MABEL : That's his cat of a wife !

JIM : I told him straight ! I said " If you're going to try and get blood out of a stone you'll land us all in the cart ! "

MABEL : What did he say ?

JIM : Oh, the usual damned nonsense. As a matter of fact, I've got an idea.

MABEL : Have you, Jim ?

JIM (*sitting down and lighting a pipe*) : Yes. I'm going to pay in Parker's cheque to my own account, and pay Rosel his seven hundred. I'll give him a bill for the other four. He's bound to take that.

MABEL : Yes, but what about Parker's cheque ?

JIM : Well, I'll enter it. The accountant doesn't take the books before the end of March and I'll pay in my Norwich money as soon as I get it.

MABEL : But you're not supposed to do that, are you ?

JIM : Strictly speaking you're not supposed to ; but when you *know* the money's coming in, it's perfectly safe.

MABEL : Yes, but if Rosel and his wife got to know about it, they could make it very nasty.

JIM : Yes, but *how* are they to know ?

MABEL : Well !

JIM : It's simply this, dear ! (*Pause.*) If I don't pay Rosel his money, he calls in his debentures and we're smashed.

MABEL : You never told me that, Jim.

JIM : Well, you know now !

MABEL : I say.

JIM : Of course, if I do *this,* it puts us absolutely right.

MABEL : When did you know ?

JIM : Know what ?

MABEL : About Rosel landing in with his debentures ?

JIM : This morning. You see he's taken over Everitt's lot. We didn't know that. We got that from Everitt this morning. It—it's rotten, isn't it ?

MABEL : I see, dear. I didn't understand, Jim. You don't think a good money-lender—a really first-class money-lender——

JIM : If you get into their hands you're absolutely done. I wouldn't dream of it. This idea of mine is the perfectly obvious thing to do. I can't think why I didn't think of it before.

MABEL : Why didn't you ?

JIM : Well, for one thing it wasn't necessary, was it ?

MABEL : No, of course not.

JIM : So, on the whole, things are not so bad, dear.

MABEL : No, dear, of course they're not.

JIM : Oh, by the way, I met Charley Fossiter. He wants us to go up with them to the Grand National. I said we would. He'll do us damned well.

MABEL : Jim, dear, we can't.

JIM : Why not ?

MABEL : I haven't got the clothes, dear.

JIM : Well, we'll get 'em.

MABEL : We won't do anything of the kind.

JIM : Well, upon my soul !

MABEL : Listen to me, Jim. It's not a bit of good. It isn't really.

JIM : But you always like them !

MABEL : It's not that, darling. I like the Fossiters and the Hamblins and the Francis girls and all that lot, but we simply can't afford to know them, so what's it matter ?

JIM : Yes, dear, I know. But the Fossiters understand. And it would do you all the good in the world—and everything paid for.

MABEL : Nonsense ! Railway fares, tips, all sorts of things ; this place going on ; Edith's wages. Be sensible, Jim.

JIM : Well, I don't know !

MABEL : I tell you what, Jim. *You* go. I *wish* you would. I want to get the room cleared out——

JIM : Not me ; not unless you go too.

MABEL : You make me tired.

JIM : Well, I'll drop 'em a line.

MABEL : You're not wild ?

JIM : No, no.

MABEL : I'm right, Jim.

JIM : I expect so.

[*Enter* FREDA *with something she has been ironing.*

FREDA : Godfrey Marvin wants to know if I'll go dancing to-night.

MABEL : Where ?

FREDA : The Berkeley.

MABEL : What shoes can you wear ?

FREDA : I can wear those black ones.

MABEL : You can't wear those at a place like the Berkeley.

JIM : Well, get some new ones.

FREDA : They're all right ; they are, really.

JIM : You don't want to look a sight at that sort of place. I'll treat you to a pair.

FREDA : No, father.

MABEL : He's taking you out a bit often, isn't he ? I've asked up Phil and Dolly to play bridge.

FREDA : Well ?

JIM : It's all right. *I'll* make a fourth. It's a pity to do her out of a good evening. Phil and Dolly can turn up any time, if it comes to that.

FREDA : Do let me go, mother.

MABEL : If you come straight home. No going on anywhere else, mind. Last time it was two o'clock, and the time before it was nearly half-past three.

JIM : That's too late.

MABEL : You won't do it to-night ?

FREDA : Of course not. Thanks, ever so.

JIM : Here you are. Get yourself a nice new pair of shoes. (*Gives her two notes.*)

FREDA : Oh, I shan't want all this.

JIM : So much the better.

FREDA : Thanks, ever so, father. I'll run over now. I'll get 'em at Sinclair's.

[*She runs U.S. and turns to L. of sitting-room door to bedroom.*

MABEL : There's a bit too much of this Godfrey Marvin.

JIM : Why, he's a very nice fellow.

MABEL : Yes, I know all about that. It's two or three nights a week now. And she's merely wasting her time. He hasn't said he's fond of her or anything like that.

JIM : Why should he ? I think they just like each other to dance with.

MABEL : Yes, you would !

[*There is a knock at the door—a sort of signal knock.*

That's Phil !

[FREDA *comes out of the room with her hat on and goes out into hall and opens the door.*

PHILIP SALES *is standing outside. He has no hat or coat on. He is rather a delicate little fellow with a somewhat wistful sort of face.*

FREDA : Hallo, Phil !

PHILIP : Hallo, Freda.

MABEL (*calling out*) : Is that you, Phil ?

PHILIP : Can I come in ?

FREDA : I'm just running out to buy a pair of shoes. *I'll* close the door.

PHILIP : What about to-night ?

JIM : We'll have a game. *I'll* take Freda's place. She's going out dancing.

MABEL : She's going out with Godfrey Marvin again.

PHILIP (*to* JIM) : Well, we'll have to put it across you instead. (*To* MABEL) Dolly wants you to come down and have tea. Also to help choose her new wall-paper.

MABEL : Eh, Jim ?

JIM : You go, Mabel. I've got to go and see a couple of houses below Sloane Square.

MABEL : He's very worried, Phil. More bad news to-day.

PHILIP : I say, you haven't ?

JIM : Not very nice. As a matter of fact, I think I see my way clear to get things right.

MABEL : He doesn't, Phil. It's as rotten as it can be.

PHILIP : I'm most awfully sorry.

JIM : Never mind. Everything comes out all right. We made a considerable fuss when we had to settle down here, but we don't grumble now, do we ?

PHILIP : That's the philosophic way of looking at it.

MABEL : Oh, I'm perfectly happy here. Always have been.

PHILIP : If it wasn't for the objectionable tenants underneath.

JIM : Exactly.

MABEL (*rising*) : Well, I suppose I'd better go and see this wall-paper.

PHILIP : Good.

MABEL : What about Freda, if you're going out ? I'd better tell Edith.

[*The door is opened by* DOLLY SALES. *She is a pretty little fair-haired thing.*

DOLLY : Are you people coming to tea or not ?

MABEL : Hullo, Dolly, we're just coming down. At least I am. Jim's got to go out.

DOLLY : My dear, they're the most *adorable* wall-papers. They're horribly expensive. If only I can get the old man to fork out.

PHILIP : Well, he's not going to !

DOLLY : We're coming up to play bridge to-night, aren't we ?

MABEL : Yes, Jim will play. Freda's going out.

DOLLY : What, with the beautiful young man ?

MABEL : Yes. I don't particularly like it, but Jim doesn't seem to think it matters. They're going to the Berkeley.

DOLLY : Well, that's all right. Has he got plenty of " mun " ?

JIM : The Marvins are very rich people. But there's nothing whatever to it.

MABEL : I don't know so much about that.

JIM : Don't be so absurd.

MABEL : It isn't absurd, Jim. (*Women know more about these things than men.*) For one thing, he picked her up at Paddington Station.

JIM : Shocking !

PHILIP : Oh dear, oh dear !

DOLLY : Bad girl !

MABEL : Oh, no. There was a fog on, the trains were all delayed, and they got talking.

JIM : Well, what's the harm in that ?

MABEL : That's all very well, but he's got relations and Freda's got us. They're all " county " and we're just what we are. It's all so silly.

DOLLY : I'm blessed if I see that. Freda's a well-educated, nice girl.

JIM : He picked her up at Paddington in a fog. Very good judge, too.

MABEL : Shut up, Jim. When you talk like that you make me positively sick.

JIM : Oh, all right !

DOLLY : Now then, you two !

[*There is an important knock at the door.*

PHILIP : Hallo !

MABEL : Now who's that ?

JIM : Don't make a noise.

[*Enter the maid* EDITH.

EDITH : Mr. Rosel would like to see you, sir.

JIM : Lord !

MABEL : I say !

DOLLY : We'll be off——

MABEL : No, no. We'll all go down together. Go on, Jim. Ask him in.

JIM : Ask him to step in.

[EDITH *goes out.*

MABEL : The beast !

DOLLY : Is he——?

MABEL : No, that's all right, Dolly. . . . Now don't you forget, Jim. Don't you sign anything.

JIM : It's all right, dear. Don't you worry.

[EDITH *shows in* MR. ROSEL. *He is really a rather nasty piece of work. He is a fairly big man, with a ginger moustache. He wears one of those disgusting heavy, long, ox-tail-brown overcoats.*

JIM : How are you ?

ROSEL : I'm sorry if I—— How are you, Mrs. Barcaldine ?

MABEL : Very well, thank you, Mr. Rosel.

ROSEL : That's right.

MABEL : Mr. and Mrs. Sales. Mr. Rosel.

PHILIP and DOLLY : How d'you do ?

ROSEL : Pleased to meet you.

JIM : I'm sorry if you've been dragged all this way down here.

ROSEL : Oh, that's all right.

MABEL : How's Mrs. Rosel ?

ROSEL : She's keeping pretty fit, thank you very much.

MABEL : Hasn't been to see me for ever so long.

ROSEL : No, she's had a lot to do lately.

JIM : Yes.

MABEL : Now we'll be off and leave these two.

ROSEL : Don't let me——

DOLLY : No, no. Our flat's just underneath. We're going to have tea.

ROSEL : I see. Good-bye, Mrs. Barcaldine. I'll tell Doris I've seen you.

MABEL : Do. Give her my love, won't you ? Good-bye.

ROSEL (*to the* SALES) : Good day to you.

PHILIP and DOLLY : Good afternoon.

[*They drift out, closing the sitting-room door after them.*

ROSEL : Your wife's looking a bit pale.

JIM : Yes, she is.

ROSEL : Now look here, Barcaldine. I'm going to have this matter settled once and for all.

JIM : Well, go on.

ROSEL : Are you going to pay me or not ?

JIM : As a matter of fact, I was going to write to you to-night on this very matter.

ROSEL : Were you ? Well ?

JIM : I propose to pay you seven hundred pounds on Tuesday, and give you a three months' bill for the remaining four hundred.

ROSEL : Oh, indeed !

[*A pause. The maid* EDITH *knocks softly at the door, then comes in. She passes out to dining-room.*

JIM : I take it that there's no objection to that proposal ?

ROSEL : None.

JIM : Then that's all right.

ROSEL : Quite.

JIM : And there'll be no necessity for you to carry out your threat of calling in your debentures ?

ROSEL : None.

[*The* MAID *returns out of dining-room, holding a decanter. She goes out by the main door. A pause.*

JIM : Nor those you acquired from Everitt ?

ROSEL : Oh, so you know that, do you ?

JIM : I do.

ROSEL : That made you sit up !

JIM : I knew then that you were out to smash me.

ROSEL : Well, I'm in it too.

JIM : Well, shall we say that you were out to cut your losses by smashing us ?

ROSEL : Yes ; that's only business.

JIM : Quite right.

ROSEL : You'd do the same, wouldn't you ?

JIM : No. You see I'm not a really first-class business man.

ROSEL : I don't think you are. Well, I am.

JIM : I'm sure you are.

ROSEL : Now we've got the East Grinstead dividends due on the fourteenth.

JIM : Yes.

ROSEL : We've got Parker's cheque for eight hundred and fifty-two pounds. That's in ?

JIM : Yes.

ROSEL : Hundred and twenty war loans ; probably six weeks overdue.

JIM : Yes.

ROSEL : And balance over last settlement, twelve hundred and twenty-eight.

JIM : Yes.

ROSEL : We'll leave the current account out. Very well, you write me a note saying you are holding our balance and Parker's cheque ; anticipate dates for the other items and I'll take it round to my solicitors with instructions to hold up my debentures, if you send along your money by Tuesday.

JIM : Yes, I see.

ROSEL : Good.

[*The* MAID *knocks gently and then comes in with a silver tray, the decanter with whisky in it, a syphon, and two glasses. She puts them on a table and then goes out.*

(*Indicating the silver tray*) I don't want any of that, do you ?

JIM : No.

ROSEL : If you'll let me have that now, I'll get off ; it's the only time I've got to see him.

JIM : Oh, yes, certainly. I'll just write it for you. (*He goes to a desk and proceeds to write.*)

[*The door suddenly bursts open and* FREDA *runs in.*

FREDA : Oh, I'm sorry.

JIM : We're busy, dear.

ROSEL : Hullo !

FREDA : Oh, how d'you do, Mr. Rosel ?

ROSEL : I believe you're getting taller.

FREDA : Oh, please don't say that. Look. Father's just treated me to a pair of shoes.

ROSEL : I say.

JIM : Run away, dear.

FREDA : I'll leave the change here. (*Putting down some silver. In a whisper to Rosel*) Lovely silver shoes with silver buckles and very, very inexpensive.

ROSEL : I say, you are a clever young lady !

FREDA : I am, aren't I ? I must go now, or father will be wild.

[*She slips off.*

BARCALDINE *is still writing.* ROSEL *saunters over and looks at the change that* FREDA *has left, then he looks around the room, waiting.*

JIM (*finishing*) : Here you are.

ROSEL : Good. (*He reads it over.*) That's quite in order. Right-ho, Barcaldine. That's all I want. Perhaps it'll be a better year. A bit more briskness in keeping our eyes on the estate market is what we want.

JIM : Yes.

ROSEL : Size up a thing quickly, and then go for it like a bull at a gate.

JIM : Yes, that's it.

ROSEL : I'll give you more of my time this autumn. I'll put a bit of punch in the business.

JIM : That's the idea. I'm coming out. I've got to see a couple of houses near Chelsea Barracks. (*He opens the door.*)

ROSEL : That's the game. Don't let a thing slip by.

JIM (*calling*) : Freda ! Your mother's down with Dolly. You go down.

FREDA (*coming on*) : All right. Look. (*Indicating her new shoes which she is wearing.*)

JIM : First-rate.

ROSEL : I say, you are a swell.

FREDA : Of course, I'll have different stockings on.

ROSEL : I like 'em as they are.

FREDA : Why, these look perfectly frightful.

ROSEL : It's more than you do, anyhow. Come on, Barcaldine. She's much too pretty a daughter for you.

JIM : I shan't be long.

FREDA : Right-ho ! (*She closes the door after them and comes into the room to the telephone.*)

[EDITH *comes in.*

FREDA *gets on to the telephone.*

FREDA (*at telephone*) : I want Regent 49821 . . . yes, please.

[EDITH *passes out with a high heap of chair covers, leaving door open.*

FREDA (*at 'phone*) : Is that Regent 49821 ? Will you put me on to Mr. Godfrey Marvin,

please ? (*A pause.*) Hullo ! Is that you, Godfrey ? I say, I can come . . . yes, so long as you bring me straight home from the Berkeley. Of course you do, you noble youth. What . . . ?

[SALES *pushes open the front door and looks in.*

PHILIP (*calling*) : Freda !

FREDA (*turning her head away from telephone*) : Shut up ! I'm on the 'phone.

[*He closes door and comes in.*

(*At 'phone.*) I'm sorry. I was interrupted. . . . What did you say ? . . . Yes, well we'll dine there then. I say ! Father treated me to a new pair of shoes, so I'll do you credit. . . . Oh, thank you, kind sir. . . . No, they won't—they fit beautifully. . . . No, you won't ; that's the only reason I dance with you. . . . Yes, that's why you're so swollen-headed. Righty-ho ! Half-past seven. Don't be late. Good-bye. (*Rings off.*) He's coming to fetch me at half-past seven.

PHILIP : Your mother's a bit annoyed about it.

FREDA : I know. Mother's mad.

PHILIP : We'd better go down. Dolly sent me up to fetch you. She's going away on Tuesday night, going to her mother's. She may be back Wednesday. She doesn't know.

FREDA : I'll get him to take me out Tuesday.

PHILIP : See if he will.

FREDA : We'd better get down. (*She goes over to him and gives him a silent and tense embrace. At the end of this she puts up her head and he kisses her. She steps away towards the door.*)

Hurry up ! Look, get father's change. I left it on the table.

[*They go out.*

CURTAIN

SCENE : *The Plaza Club. The balcony outside the dance room. There are French windows on the left of stage, opening into the very brightly-lit dance-room. It is supposed to be on the second floor level. A stone balustrade runs along the back of the set, which is quite shallow, and round and down to the right. The dim view of house-tops, trees, and odd street lights is seen all round. The balcony has a red-and-white awning over it and a red carpet is on it. There are two steps going down to it from the French windows. There are two or three pretty white basket-chairs and one or two small tables. Some soft charming lamps hang from the awning. The whole effect is most graceful.*

When the curtain goes up the French windows are open and the band can be heard playing inside. A stout young man, with a red face and a small moustache, is slumbering in a chair on L. He is in full evening dress.

A WAITER *comes in through the window conducting* FREDA BARCALDINE *and* GODFREY MARVIN. FREDA *is simply dressed but looks very charming and attractive.* MARVIN *is a very nice looking boy and extremely well turned out. He is clean-shaven and looks excessively young. The* WAITER *sees the other man.*

WAITER : Here you are, sir. (*To* MARVIN.)

MARVIN : Hallo, there's old Bovill. Wake up, you disgusting beast.

FREDA : Oh, don't go and wake the poor man.

MARVIN : Wake up ! D'you hear !

BOVILL (*opening his eyes*) : What's the matter ?

MARVIN : Why don't you go home to bed ?

BOVILL : Who *are* you ?

MARVIN : Never mind who I am. Wake up. There's a lady here.

BOVILL : Oh, it's you. (*Rising doubtfully and seeing* FREDA) I say, I'm most awfully sorry.

MARVIN : This is Captain Bovill, Freda. Miss Barcaldine.

BOVILL : I'm so sorry. Do please overlook this slight discrepancy. Absolutely fast asleep.

FREDA : It's a shame. We've disturbed you.

BOVILL : Not a bit of it.

WAITER (*coming forward with wine-list*) : Shall I get you——

MARVIN : I say, yes.

FREDA : I don't want anything to drink. I'll have some coffee.

MARVIN : Sure ? Coffee, please. And a whisky and soda.

WAITER : Double, sir ?

MARVIN : No, single.

[WAITER *goes out.*

BOVILL : Are you going to Vivian Crandle's dance to-morrow night ?

MARVIN : Yes, I am. I hope you're not.

BOVILL : As a matter of fact, I am. Are you going, Miss Barcaldine ?

FREDA : No.

BOVILL : Oh, but you ought to.

MARVIN : Why don't you go home ?

BOVILL : He's a nice fellow, Godfrey. He's

always so glad to see one. Don't you go and catch cold here. You ought to be awfully careful after all this sort of thing.

FREDA : I'm not a bit cold. Isn't it perfectly ripping out here ?

MARVIN : Not so dusty, is it ?

BOVILL : Have you only just turned up ? My good fellow, everybody's going home.

[WAITER *brings on drink from R. He goes out R.*

MARVIN : We've been at the Berkeley. Miss Barcaldine wanted to come on here.

BOVILL : The ladies are all exactly the same as far as I can see. They never want to go to bed.

MARVIN : No, I don't think they do.

FREDA : Don't be mean.

BOVILL : I took my old aunt out the other night and she was positively ruthless.

MARVIN : I know ; they're all alike. I promised this bad child's mother that I'd bring her straight home, and here we are, and I'll get all the blame.

FREDA : Well, just another ten minutes.

BOVILL : My dear young lady, be advised by an old campaigner. Our complexions won't stand it.

FREDA : I expect you're right.

BOVILL : *I'm* going home now. If my grandmother was with me I'd probably have to stay up till six. Good-bye.

FREDA : Good-bye.

BOVILL : Good night, old stick.

MARVIN : Good morning.

[BOVILL *goes out through window.*

FREDA : Nice man.

MARVIN : He's a very good old bird really. Tremendously kind-hearted chap. Hasn't got a bob. Don't know how he manages to live. I'm sure you're cold.

FREDA : I'm not a bit.

MARVIN : I expect Mrs. Barcaldine will be furious.

FREDA : No, she won't. Godfrey, will you take me out Tuesday ?

MARVIN : Yes, dear, of course I will. Why Tuesday ?

FREDA : Well, it's the one night I'll be free.

MARVIN : I see.

FREDA : I'll have to go home really early, then.

MARVIN : You will, eh ? Right-ho ! (*They drink.*) I say, Freda, I believe I've bored you a bit this evening. I have, haven't I ?

FREDA : Of course you haven't. You never do.

MARVIN : Don't I ? Don't I really ?

FREDA : Of course not.

[*A pause.*

MARVIN : I'm awfully fond of you, Freda. I am, dear.

FREDA : I know you are, Godfrey.

MARVIN : I know you think I'm a sort of baby boy and that sort of stuff, but I've known a few girls and I feel altogether different about you.

FREDA : Do you, dear ?

MARVIN : Yes, I do really. Really I do.

FREDA : It's a shame.

MARVIN : What's a shame ?

FREDA : Your feeling like that.

MARVIN : Yes, I know. I really am potty about you, Freda. Relations, of course, are a nuisance, but I'd chuck the whole thing ; I would really.

FREDA : How d'you mean ?

MARVIN : What I mean to say—if you liked me a bit and we got engaged——

FREDA : Stop, Godfrey, please.

MARVIN : All right. I'm sorry.

[*Pause.*

FREDA : Godfrey, I think you're a dear.

MARVIN : It doesn't matter. I understand.

FREDA : Don't.

MARVIN : There's another chap, isn't there ?

FREDA : What ?

MARVIN : There is, isn't there, Freda ?

FREDA : Yes.

MARVIN : I thought so.

[*Pause.*

FREDA : What made you think that ?

MARVIN : I guessed. Are you fond of him, dear ? Is he all right ?

FREDA : What do you mean—is he all right ?

MARVIN : I mean—I mean—is he fond of you and all that sort of thing ?

FREDA : Of course he is.

MARVIN : Oh, well, I'm jolly glad. I am, dear. I'm really jolly glad.

FREDA : That's good.

MARVIN : What !

FREDA : I suppose we'd better go.

MARVIN : Freda.

FREDA : Well ?

MARVIN : You'll marry this chap, I suppose ?

FREDA : No.

MARVIN : Not ? Why not ?

FREDA : Because he's got a wife already.

MARVIN : Oh, God Almighty !

[*A considerable pause.*

Then that's that !

FREDA : Yes.

[*Rises and crosses to behind her. She puts up her hand, which he takes.*

MARVIN : I *am* damned sorry. Just fancy you !

FREDA : Yes ; just fancy, me ! (*Withdrawing hand.*)

MARVIN : What's going to happen.

FREDA : I don't know.

MARVIN : And you're fond of him ?

FREDA : Need you ask ?

MARVIN : Would he—would he leave his wife, d'you think ?

FREDA : That's just it. She's my friend. She loves him. She adores him. Oh, Godfrey, I wish I was dead !

MARVIN : Freda !

FREDA : What ?

MARVIN : You're in dreadful trouble !

FREDA : I know. Dreadful, horrible, beastly trouble. There now.

[*He makes a sort of movement and then goes and leans over the end of the balcony.*

Come on. Let's go home.

MARVIN : Can I do anything ? Can't I do anything ?

FREDA : What can anyone do ?

MARVIN : I don't know.

FREDA : I am a beast to tell you all this. Oh, Godfrey, don't look like that, please ! It was all my own fault, Godfrey. It was really. They're friends of father and mother. I just got fond of him. I don't know why. I don't know why now. I think I just wanted to see if he was as wonderful as she thought he was. I swear that was it. Then it came on all of a sudden. We both pulled like hell against it. We did, Godfrey. We did, both of us.

MARVIN : Yes, dear.

FREDA : But they seemed to fling us together. They might have done it on purpose. Mother made me go with him to see his wife in a nursing home. I howled my eyes out on top of a 'bus all the way back and he got off and left me. His wife used to get me to go with him to Lord's because she hated cricket. I swear to you I tried so, Godfrey. We both did.

MARVIN : I know.

FREDA : Then I began to be hateful to him and he began to be hateful to me. Then you cropped up, and I was glad and he was glad. Then she took to going away to help her mother who's

moving into a new house. She'd gone away just for a couple of days. . . . Well, now do you understand ?

MARVIN : It's as bad as that.

FREDA : It's worse. I'm afraid it's worse. Oh, my God !

[*A long pause.*

We'd better get along now.

MARVIN : Freda ! (*Stopping her.*)

FREDA : Yes ?

MARVIN : If marrying me would do any good at any time, you know what I mean—I'd like you to feel you'd always have that to fall back on.

[*She turns and falls sobbing into his arms. She is literally racked with sobs. Eventually she holds his arms and looks up to him.*

FREDA : I think you are the dearest, sweetest thing that's ever lived ! I'll never forget that, Godfrey, as long as I live.

MARVIN : Don't !

FREDA : Come along.

[*She opens the window and a flood of music pours in.*

I'll meet you in the hall. I must do my eyes !

MARVIN : I've got to pay the waiter.

FREDA : Right-ho ! I'll meet you in the hall.

[*She goes off down R. He remains C.*

CURTAIN

SCENE : *Barcaldine's flat again. The* BARCALDINES *and the* SALES *have been playing bridge. They have just left the card-table and are sitting up. The two men are dressed just the same ; the two women have made an attempt at an evening change.*

TIME : *It is late the same night.*

JIM : If I give you two shillings that makes us square.

PHILIP : Thanks.

MABEL : Then Dolly gives me sixpence.

JIM : No. See, if I give you this shilling, that puts you right.

MABEL : Oh, I see.

DOLLY : Hooray ! I'm the big winner.

JIM : That's the second time. Sit down a minute. You're not in a hurry.

PHILIP : I made a mess of that last hand.

MABEL : You most certainly did, Phil.

JIM : It's a funny thing. We might call it the Bridge Barometer of Fortune. When I first taught Mabel we used to play sixpence a hundred. Do you remember, dear ? When we were at Shepherd's Bush.

MABEL : I remember. Freda was about three then.

JIM : And we gradually worked our way up to half-crowns, with occasional five bobs.

PHILIP : Five bob a hundred is pretty stiff !

MABEL : Always five bob when we played with the Fossiters.

JIM : Now we've got down to the shilling mark again. I wonder what's next ?

MABEL : Don't let's wonder, for heaven's sake.

JIM : You play a good game, Dolly. You gradually improve.

DOLLY : I'm calling better.

MABEL : It's more than Phil is.

DOLLY : Phil's hopeless.

PHILIP : I wonder why it is.

DOLLY : You don't concentrate.

MABEL : It's not that, Dolly. He hasn't got a card sense.

JIM : That's everything. Look at Rosel ; never loses a trick. He's a magnificent bridge player.

DOLLY : Yes, I should think he would be.

MABEL : So's she. When those two get together you may as well say good-bye.

JIM : That's a fact.

DOLLY : What's she like ?

MABEL : Great fat greasy beast !

DOLLY : He wasn't so bad this afternoon.

MABEL : I'm glad you think so.

DOLLY : Did you notice how he said : " Pleased to meet you," when you introduced us ?

MABEL : Yes.

PHILIP : Let's hope he never says anything worse than that.

JIM : That's what *I* was thinking, Phil.

MABEL : Anyway, it shows the class of man he is.

DOLLY : That's what I mean.

MABEL : You should see Doris Rosel when she's all dressed out to kill. My dear !

DOLLY : Tell us.

MABEL : You know ; everything simply *laid* on !

DOLLY : I know.

MABEL : Even Jim, who doesn't take much notice—even he jibs at Doris's clothes.

JIM : Yes, she's pretty bad, I must admit.

DOLLY : I'd love to see her !

PHILIP : Just why ?

DOLLY : What ?

PHILIP : Just why should you want to see her if she looks a sight ?

DOLLY : Oh, I don't know.

MABEL : She's behind the old man all the time.

JIM : Now, why should you say that ?

MABEL : Because I know. Women don't make many mistakes over that sort of thing. Do they, Dolly ?

DOLLY : No, they don't.

MABEL : He's all bluster over business, but when she wants a thing done she gets her way. You mark my words.

DOLLY : Why's she got her knife into you two ?

MABEL : Jealousy ; that's all it is. When the firm was doing well, why, Jim got to know people that wouldn't have had George Rosel in their houses to save their lives !

JIM : Rot !

MABEL : It's a fact, Dolly. Jim never tried to cut a dash. He hates all that sort of thing, and

so do I. But people liked Jim ; you know, really nice people. They just liked his easy-going manner. But the Rosels—no, thank you !

DOLLY : Isn't it putrid that people like that have got all the dough ?

JIM : Well, there you are.

DOLLY : I say, we'd better be off.

MABEL : No, don't go.

DOLLY : Must. Phil's got to be up early in the morning.

JIM : Well, so've I. Help yourself to another drink, Phil.

PHILIP : No, thanks very much all the same. We may as well chatter on a bit, if they're waiting up for Freda.

JIM (*helping himself*) : Why won't you have another ?

DOLLY : He scarcely ever drinks at all now. He's getting quite reformed.

MABEL : You never did take much, Phil.

PHILIP : No. Not even when it was cheap.

DOLLY : I believe it would do him good if he did. He's very down. He wants bucking up.

MABEL : I expect you want a change, Phil.

PHILIP : I think that's what it is.

JIM : I bet that's what it is.

DOLLY : Sits and smokes and stares at the fire.

PHILIP : No, I don't, dear.

DOLLY : Yes, you do.

MABEL : Jim does that too.

PHILIP : There you are, you see.

MABEL : Listen. That's a taxi. I expect that's Freda.

JIM : Not so bad after all. Don't walk into the poor girl.

PHILIP : Funny how very silent some of these taxis are now.

JIM : Eh—yes.

DOLLY : Does he bring her in ?

MABEL : No, just leaves her at the door.

PHILIP : Well, we had some very good rubbers to-night, Jim.

JIM : First-rate they were.

DOLLY : Does he have far to go ?

MABEL : He's got rooms in Jermyn Street.

DOLLY : Oh, in Jermyn Street.

PHILIP : Well, now the wanderer has returned, I suppose we'd better make a move.

MABEL : Perhaps it's not her.

PHILIP : One thing, we've settled about the wall-paper, haven't we ?

DOLLY : Oh, I'm sure it will be cheapest in the long run.

PHILIP : I expect ; don't you think so, Jim ?

JIM : Oh, yes.

DOLLY : I'm sure of it.

[*Enter* FREDA *at the front door.*

MABEL : Here she is !

[FREDA *comes in*

FREDA : Hallo !

DOLLY : You don't mean to say it's you ?

FREDA : Any complaints ?

MABEL : I thought the Berkeley closed at half-past twelve ?

FREDA : So it did. But Godfrey had to see a friend of his at the Plaza Club, Captain Bovill, so we called in on the way home.

MABEL : Called in !

FREDA : Well, practically. You don't call this late !

JIM : No, it's not so bad.

MABEL : Anybody there you knew ?

FREDA : Of course not ! All the nibs and the nobs ! Very nice lot of people. It was jolly good.

DOLLY : The best of you, Freda, is that you never come back as if you'd been bored stiff.

MABEL : No, she doesn't.

JIM : She gets that from her mother.

PHILIP : It's a great gift.

MABEL : I never got that way because I was married so young. I think girls are afraid of making young men conceited by ever seeming pleased at anything.

PHILIP : I fancy it must be extremely difficult to appear happy and well-bred at the same time.

MABEL : P'raps so.

FREDA : Phil's all over philosophy to-night, isn't he ?

DOLLY : He won't be to-morrow morning when he's got to get up. Good night, Mabel dear. Thanks ever so much.

MABEL : We'll go to Selfridge's about twelve. Good night, Phil.

JIM : Good night. I've got a very busy day to-morrow.

FREDA : Good night, Dolly. Good night, Phil.

DOLLY : I like the new shoes.

FREDA : They're nice, aren't they ?

PHILIP : Splendid. Thanks so much, Mabel. Good night.

JIM (*as he sees them out*) : Have you got any matches ?

PHILIP (*outside*) : Yes, thanks. Heaps.

DOLLY (*outside*) : Light one now. So long.

JIM (*who is standing on the landing*) : Good night.

[*He comes in and shuts the hall door.*

FREDA : Sorry, mother, if I was a bit late.

MABEL : It's all right, dear. I'm not really a spoilsport. I'm only thinking of your own good. You know that.

FREDA : Of course I do.

JIM (*entering*) : I think I'll have another drink before I retire. You, Mabel ?

MABEL : No, thanks. I must just see if Edith's hung the tea-cloths up.

FREDA : I'll do that, mother.

MABEL : No, you get off to bed. You look washed out.

[*She goes off to kitchen.*

FREDA : Good night, father dear.

[*He is helping himself to a drink.*

JIM : Good night, darling. So glad you've had a good evening.

FREDA : It was ripping.

JIM : He's a nice boy. I like him very much.

FREDA : Godfrey ! Oh, he's a topper.

JIM : Yes.

FREDA : Well, it won't take me long to get to sleep to-night. (*Going. Picks cloak off chair, L.*)

JIM : I bet it won't.

FREDA : Good night, mother darling.

[JIM *goes over with his drink and sits by table, L.*

A minute's pause and the kitchen light goes out, then MABEL *comes down and into the room.*

MABEL : Did you lock up, Jim ?

JIM : Yes, dear.

MABEL : That girl looks a bit pale to-night.

JIM : Oh, she's tired. *You* ought to be, too, dear.

MABEL : I am a bit. (*Pause.*) Jim, I shouldn't worry about that brute.

JIM : Me ! Rather not. I'm not worrying.

MABEL (*sitting on table, facing him*) : It'll be all right. You didn't sign anything, did you ?

JIM : Oh, no.

MABEL : You won't, will you, Jim ?

JIM : Of course not. You *are* a funny girl, if you get an idea in your head.

MABEL : It's all very well. I know what they're like, those two.

JIM : Damned swine ! He wouldn't even have a drink this afternoon.

MABEL : Wouldn't he really ! That's like them. Never mind, dear.

JIM : Not me !

MABEL : Poor boy ! I always know when you're worried. You get regular lines under your eyes.

JIM : Have I got 'em to-night ?

MABEL : Yes, dear.

JIM : I haven't.

MABEL : Looking to see if I'd got any under mine, aren't you ? (*She gives him a shake, laughing.*) Yes, you were. I know you were.

JIM : I wasn't.

MABEL : Yes, you were. You're just like a little child.

JIM : I'm not.

MABEL : Poor old Jim ! (*She bends over and kisses his forehead.*)

JIM : Bless you, my dear !

MABEL : Give us a sip. (*She takes the glass and just sips a drop of it.*) Very nice, too. There you are. You can have it. Drink it, Jim. We *must* get to bed. (*She rises, crosses and opens the dining-room door.*) I'm leaving this door open. It lets a bit more air in.

JIM (*rising*) : What about these things ?

MABEL : Leave 'em till morning.

[FREDA'S *voice calls.*

FREDA (*off*) : Good night, mother.

MABEL (*outside*) : Good night, darling.

FREDA (*calling*) : I'm in bed already. Good night, father.

JIM : Good night, dear. God bless you.

[*He turns out the light of the sitting-room, then the hall light, and goes into their bedroom and closes the door.*

CURTAIN

SCENE : *Barcaldine's flat. It is a sunny, bright day. Sunlight is streaming in through the window. The door into the hall is open.*

MR. *and* MRS. BARCALDINE *are standing, one on one side of the stage and the other on the other.*

1ST NURSE *in uniform comes out from L. and crosses to the kitchen. She is holding some few odd things.*

There is a gentle knock at the door and EDITH *comes out of the kitchen and goes to the door and opens it. She lets in another* NURSE. *She is in another uniform. She has some flowers in her arms. She comes to door of room and speaks very softly to* MABEL BARCALDINE.

2ND NURSE : I've brought you some flowers.

MABEL (*in a whisper*) : Oh, thank you so much.

2ND NURSE : Aren't they pretty ? I'll put them in water. They're in there ?

MABEL : Yes. I'm waiting now.

2ND NURSE : I see. (*She speaks in a soft but painfully bright voice.*)

1ST NURSE *goes into the kitchen with the flowers. The* 1ST NURSE *comes back and appears to pause outside the bedroom on left and then comes into the room. She has the same identical soft bright manner of her confrère.*

MABEL : You must be tired out, Nurse. Won't you get something to eat now ?

1ST NURSE : I'm quite all right. I had my glass of milk.

[*A pause.*

JIM : They're some time, aren't they ?

1ST NURSE : No, no. Aren't they pretty flowers Nurse has brought?

MABEL : Lovely.

[*The door, L., sounds, and a* MAN'S *voice calls "Nurse." It is so low as to be scarcely perceptible. The* 1ST NURSE *immediately goes in.* MR. *and* MRS. BARCALDINE *are still left standing.*

MABEL : They're a long time.

JIM : Yes.

[*A pause.*

Now then, dear. Don't——

MABEL : I'm all right.

[*The* 2ND NURSE *comes in with the flowers in a bowl.*

2ND NURSE : There !

MABEL : Aren't they lovely ?

JIM : Lovely.

2ND NURSE : Selling them up by Hyde Park Corner, any amount.

MABEL : I expect.

[*The* NURSE *moves to the door and then glances towards door, L. ; she turns round.*

2ND NURSE : They're coming.

[*She goes off.*

The BARCALDINES *move a little. Then the* 1ST NURSE *appears with the doctors.* DOCTOR SANGSTER, *their own doctor, is a tall, thin, ginger man of about fifty. The consultant,* HINCHCLIFF, *is a younger man with a black moustache.*

SANGSTER (*coming in*) : Would you mind just letting us have a chat ? Thank you so very much.

[*The* BARCALDINES *hasten out, closing the door upon the two doctors.*

This scene is taken very slowly.

HINCHCLIFF : Yes—well ?

[*A pause.*

SANGSTER : You don't——?

HINCHCLIFF : No.

SANGSTER : If she can——?

HINCHCLIFF : I don't think she will.

SANGSTER : You don't ?

HINCHCLIFF : When was the first injection ?

SANGSTER : About five o'clock last night.

HINCHCLIFF : Yes. Well, there you are, you see.

SANGSTER : I'd better stay on.

HINCHCLIFF : Oh, yes. Do they know ?

SANGSTER : Er—yes. I'm very sorry. Poor fellow just gone bankrupt.

HINCHCLIFF : Has he, indeed ?

SANGSTER : I've known them for a long time. Quite well off a few years ago.

HINCHCLIFF : What a shocking thing. D'you want me to see the child ?

SANGSTER : No, I don't think so. Quite healthy ; a girl.

HINCHCLIFF : They haven't said——?

SANGSTER : No, I know nothing.

HINCHCLIFF : Well now, d'you want me to talk to them ?

SANGSTER : If you will.

HINCHCLIFF : All right.

[SANGSTER *goes to the door.*

SANGSTER : Come in.

[*The* BARCALDINES *come in.*

HINCHCLIFF : Well, both Doctor Sangster and myself are very, very anxious.

JIM : You are ?

HINCHCLIFF : You see, Mr. Barcaldine—I don't know if the nurse told you—it was a very close thing this morning.

JIM : Was it ?

HINCHCLIFF : There's no reaction, is there, Sangster ?

SANGSTER : No, none.

MABEL : Does that mean—— ?

HINCHCLIFF : If—if she holds out——

[*The* BARCALDINES *are standing side by side. They seem to have automatically dropped into this odd position. It is as if they were in custody.*

JIM : Yes ?

HINCHCLIFF : If she holds out, it maybe that she may acquire some strength, but at the moment, she is just keeping alive, Mrs. Barcaldine.

JIM : Yes.

MABEL : Can't anything be done ?

HINCHCLIFF : Dr. Sangster is doing everything that is humanly possible.

JIM : Yes, we know that. (*To* SANGSTER.) Will you—will you come in again as soon as you possibly——

SANGSTER : I'm remaining here.

[*That is their sentence.* MABEL *looks at her husband. He puts his arm round her and takes her out of the room.*

HINCHCLIFF : I've got to get up to St. Mary's.

SANGSTER : Yes.

[*They go into the hall.* HINCHCLIFF *puts on his hat and coat.*

The doctors shake hands and HINCHCLIFF *goes off.*

SANGSTER *goes into bedroom, L.*

The 2ND NURSE *comes in. She has changed to her "duty" head-gear. She has some note-paper and sits down at a little desk to write a private letter.*

The CHARWOMAN *comes in.*

CHARWOMAN : Can I get you some tea, miss ?

2ND NURSE : In about half an hour, please. A *little* bit weaker, please. I only like very weak tea. It was a little too strong.

CHARWOMAN : A bit weaker. Very well, miss.

2ND NURSE : If you would be so good. I wonder if you have such a thing as a postage stamp ?

CHARWOMAN : I'll see, miss, if Edith's got one.

2ND NURSE : Thank you so much.

[*The* CHARWOMAN *goes out.*

The 1ST NURSE *comes running out of the bedroom. She looks into room.*

1ST NURSE : Quick !

[*She dashes into kitchen.*

The 2ND NURSE *springs up and hastens into bedroom. The* 1ST NURSE *goes running back across the hall holding a kettle.* EDITH *and the* CHARWOMAN *come into the hall and stand gaping at the door. There is a moment's pause and then* MABEL'S *voice gives a most dreadful scream.* EDITH *looks with horror at the other woman and then sinks on her knees, sobbing, and dropping her head until it almost touches the floor.*

CURTAIN

SCENE VIII

SCENE : *Rosel's office. This is a grubby type of office. Any amount of documents simply litter the whole place. There is a big desk in the centre which is almost full of papers. There is a main door at L. back. That is the only entrance. A fireplace with fire alight is at centre back. Windows R. Female typist at desk below the windows has a sort of face that means nothing whatever. The windows have those peculiar reflectors outside which give a most distressing lighting effect to the scene.*

A CLERK *comes in. He has a velour hat on.*

GIRL : You're late.

CLERK : No. The old man knew I 'ad to go down the City.

GIRL : Mr. Andrews rang up. Wants to see him some time this morning.

CLERK : He can't. We got to go to Carey Street.

GIRL : What for ?

CLERK : Barcaldine.

GIRL : Well, that won't take all day.

CLERK : Well, we'll be hanging about all the morning. Public examination.

GIRL : Well, you'd better ring up Andrews' office and let 'em know.

CLERK : Leave it till after he comes.

GIRL : Wot you do Saturday ?

CLERK : Went and saw the Spurs ; West Bromwich Albion !

GIRL : All right, was it ?

CLERK : A draw ; one-one. Not too good. Wot did *you* do ?

GIRL : Went and saw my sister. She lives at Neasden. That's my married sister.

CLERK : Oh, yes.

GIRL : She's been married two years. She's four years older than I am.

CLERK : Oh yes.

[*Outer door sounds.*

Here he is.

[ROSEL *comes in, in a hurry.*

CLERK : Morning, sir.

ROSEL : Good morning.

GIRL : Mr. Andrews rang up, Mr. Rosel. Wanted to see you this morning.

ROSEL : Can't see anybody till after two. (*To* CLERK) We're safe to be through by one, aren't we ?

CLERK : I should think so. We're fourth on the list.

ROSEL : Is Everitt calling here or is he going straight there ?

CLERK : Going straight there, sir.

[ROSEL *is seated at his desk.*

ROSEL : Now, we take this lot. Have you got everything here ?

CLERK : Yes, sir.

ROSEL : You're sure ?

CLERK : Yes, sir.

ROSEL : And the ledgers have gone down ?

CLERK : Oh, yes.

ROSEL : When had *we* better get down ?

CLERK : Arthur's going to ring up when it's getting near.

ROSEL : Right. I'll take my letters now.

CLERK : All right, sir.

[*The* CLERK *goes out.*

ROSEL (*opening letters*) : They want a memorandum for the Bagshot estate business. Can you look that up ?

GIRL : Wot, the whole thing ?

ROSEL : Yes. See what you've got.

GIRL : All right.

ROSEL : Here's another letter from Beasley. (*He goes on opening and looking at letters.*) Cheque from the Burlingham Allotments. Acknowledge this.

[*Enter* CLERK.

CLERK : It's Mrs. Rosel, sir.

ROSEL : What ! (*He turns round in his chair.*)

[MRS. ROSEL *walks straight in. She fulfils the description that* MABEL *gave of her in the Second Act.* DORIS ROSEL *is about forty, big and quite abominable.*

ROSEL : Good Lord ! What's up ?

DORIS : I just want to have a chat. Good morning, Miss Stevens. I want a word with Mr. Rosel.

GIRL : Good morning, Mrs. Rosel. (*Rising.*)

ROSEL : Well, look here, I've got a whole lot of work to do.

DORIS : Never mind. I must see you.

ROSEL : All right then. (*He nods to the* GIRL.)

[GIRL *goes out.*

Well, what is it ?

DORIS : Look here. It's about the Barcaldines.

ROSEL : Well, what about 'em ?

DORIS : My dear, would you believe it ? Poor Freda had a child.

ROSEL : Go on !

DORIS : Isn't it awful ?

ROSEL : Oh ! *That's* what it was.

DORIS : Then pneumonia came on, or so they said, and the poor little thing couldn't stand it. Would you believe it ?

ROSEL : God's truth !

DORIS : They didn't half keep it dark.

ROSEL : Who told you ?

DORIS : I got it from Gladys. She came in just after you went out.

ROSEL : What about the child ?

DORIS : It's a little girl. It's a lovely little girl, they say.

ROSEL : Well, who was the—— ?

DORIS : That's what nobody can make out. Nobody got the faintest idea.

ROSEL : Where've they got the child ?

DORIS : Mabel's taken her somewhere down in Dorsetshire.

ROSEL : God's truth !

DORIS : I know it was awful, that poor fellow having to come down for this dust-up less than four weeks after the funeral ; but I simply can't bear this, Stan, I simply can't.

ROSEL : Well, what can *I* do ?

DORIS : I don't know.

ROSEL : I'm just as sorry as you are, old girl. I think it's terrible, but what can *I* do ?

DORIS : You know ! When you think of poor Mabel ! She wasn't so bad——

ROSEL : Who said she was ?

DORIS : I know.

ROSEL : What can *I* do ? I can't tell the Official Receiver to stop this business just because the fellow's lost his daughter. You're just like a woman. I'm sorry for Barcaldine. I'm damned sorry for him. But he's swindled the firm and what can I do ?

DORIS : That's all that matters, isn't it ?

ROSEL : What d'you mean ?

DORIS : That he's swindled the firm.

ROSEL : My word, you're a good one to talk.

DORIS : Me ?

ROSEL : Yes, you. What about when I didn't want to buy up Everitt's debentures ? You were nice and pleasant and kind then, weren't you ? What about when they tried to raise a second mortgage on their Norwich place ; *you* were on it, old girl. Oh, yes, you were, fast enough.

DORIS : Shut up, you devil, you mean, stinking devil !

ROSEL : What !

DORIS : You mean, stinking devil ! I wish to God I'd done what that poor girl did.

ROSEL : What d'you mean—— ?

DORIS : D'you think because I've never had a kid myself I don't know ?

ROSEL : You're mad !

DORIS : I tell you what you're going to do, my bonny boy. You're going to tear up that letter.

ROSEL : What letter ?

DORIS : You know what letter ! The letter about Parker's cheque. You're going to tear it up.

ROSEL : Tear it up ! Why, that's the whole thing.

DORIS : I know it's the whole thing. That's why you're going to tear it up. He's not going to have no Public Prosecutor so far as we're concerned. My God, he's not.

ROSEL : You've gone stark, staring mad. All the papers have gone in.

DORIS : No, they haven't. You've kept it back to the last. You've got it on you now. It's in your leather case.

ROSEL : I tell you it's not.

DORIS : Let me see it then !

ROSEL : I shan't !

DORIS : No ; because you're a liar !

ROSEL : Well, what if I am ? What's that letter got to do with you ? It's the one thing I've got to nail him down with.

DORIS : Nail him down ! You make me sick. Is it going to get you back one brass farthing ? Is it going to do one single thing on God's earth except show other people what a clever man you are ?

ROSEL : Never mind about clever. I'm honest at any rate !

DORIS : Oh, you've always been ever so honest, haven't you ? You're a good one to turn up your

nose. Why, *that* poor devil's been too big a fool to be anything *else* but honest.

ROSEL : And do you think I'm going to make *myself* a fool before the whole of London ? Do you think I'm going to let my friends in, and everyone else, just to please you ? You're thinking a fat lot about me, aren't you ? Just about as much as you ever thought of Jim Barcaldine.

DORIS : I'm just thinking of Mabel and that poor little baby, without a mother, and without a father.

ROSEL : Very nice of you. We know all that. *You* get your pretty ideas and *I've* got to do the paying. I stick and slave in this office just for fun, I suppose ; just to pass the day. And the first time you take it into your head to be sorry for somebody it's *me* that's got to foot the bill. It's *me* that's got to let in all my pals. And why ? Not because of Mabel Barcaldine and her poor wretch of a husband. Not because of their dead daughter. No. *I'm* to be kicked over because some brat has come into the world, and *that's* something *you've* had to do without !

[*She has got her gloves in her hand and she slashes him across the face with them. They appear to catch him in the eyes as he holds his hands up to them and bends his head as if in pain.*

DORIS : Oh, that's it, is it ? That's it ! That's it ! That's it !

[*The* CLERK *opens the door.*

CLERK : Arthur's just rung up——

DORIS (*swinging round*) : Get out of it. Get out of it ! D'you hear ?

[*The* CLERK *goes.*

ROSEL : So you're going to set about my office, are you ?

DORIS (*speaking with the utmost tensity, but well under control*) : Oh, no, I'm not. I'm going to get away, Stanley. I'm going to get away, d'you hear ? I got what you said, just now. I've got it all right. Don't you forget it. I shan't. I shan't as long as my body breathes : you filthy, vile beast !

ROSEL : I never meant it.

DORIS : Then give me that letter.

ROSEL : What !

DORIS : Give me that letter !

[ROSEL *pulls out a leather pocket-book, takes out a letter, crumples it up and flings it on the floor.*

Got it ! (*She jumps at it like a wild cat, looks at it to make certain it's the right one, and runs towards the fireplace.*) I'll show you what we do when another brat comes into the world. (*She tears it into bits and flings it on the fire.*) Can you understand me now ? Can you ? Can you ? No, of course you can't, and never will. Good morning, Mr. Rosel. You can have your dinner by yourself to-night. *I'm* going to the pictures. (*As she flounces out, the scene ends.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE IX

SCENE : *Carey Street. A Court in Bankruptcy Buildings. For the benefit of those managers who are unacquainted with this edifice, the author will proceed to describe the scene. The Court is a seedy*

sort of replica of the High Court. It lacks even the sordid soul of a police court. It is thirty years old and yet completely new. It has never known anything to age it. Its passing visitors have nearly all been failures, its permanent officials have existed solely upon the fruits of failure. Failure has been the justification of their existence. It lacks all the glitter of splendid sin ; it is simply the paltry lethal chamber of the vanquished. Over the bench where the Registrar sits is a row of perfectly dreadful windows, the only windows in the chamber. Two shocking chandeliers hang from the ceiling. Five feet of yellow tiles go round the walls. The dock for the debtor is also on the right of the Registrar. It has a ridiculous ledge for holding ledgers. It goes up too high and is put there to make the debtor look absurd. The front row is for the Bar, but at the right end of it is a compartment for the Official Receiver. The other rows are left for solicitors, creditors, and other vermin.

When the curtain goes up, the Court is fairly full. BARCALDINE *is in the dock surrounded by books and papers and various débris. The* REGISTRAR *looks just like a judge. He has a wig on, and so have the barristers in the front row. The* OFFICIAL RECEIVER, *who wears ordinary clothes, is standing up asking questions.* BARCALDINE *is wearing mourning and has a black tie on. This scene should be tackled in a certain manner. To the Bankruptcy Court we shall submit that mystical whisper of the "phantastic" which has been allowed to slumber, so to speak. There should be a touch of Hogarth in the air —of Hogarth in the land of dead sea fruit. A tincture of iodoform to drab the fancy, a ghost of carnival in Carey Street. All this is merely a hint to the producer.*

Nearly everybody seems to be covered in ledgers,

except the REGISTRAR *and the* OFFICIAL RECEIVER, *who have rolls of papers instead. The badgering of* BARCALDINE *is at high function.*

O. RECEIVER : Then the assessment of a valuation is re-entered into personal property and such personal property re-valued as an assessment.

[*Loud laughter.*

CLINCHPOLE (BARRISTER) : Certainly not.

REGISTRAR (*to* BARRISTER) : Mr. Clinchpole, how do you propose to adumbrate an excess of expenditure in the previous year as against the re-valued assessment ?

CLINCHPOLE : I don't. (*Offensively.*)

O. RECEIVER : Then I suggest to your honour——

CLINCHPOLE : I say that I did not exceed my income the previous year.

REGISTRAR : How so ? How can you say that ?

CLINCHPOLE (*thumping a law reference book*) : H. W. Singlebottom 1894.

REGISTRAR : But if I remember rightly, the Singlebottom appeal was referred back to the Divisional Court.

O. RECEIVER : Precisely.

CLINCHPOLE : Yes, but with costs upon judgment following the Watkinson ruling of 1888 which failed in the Court of Appeal in 1904.

[*Sensation.*

REGISTRAR : Well, really !

O. RECEIVER : This is the first I've heard of it !

JIM (*mildly*) : I bought a small house——

USHER : Hush, hush.

REGISTRAR : Please !

CLINCHPOLE : Be quiet !

O. RECEIVER : Really !

REGISTRAR (*leaning back*) : Mr. Clinchpole is trying to establish as a fact a fact that cannot be established !

[*Hearty laughter in which* MR. BARCALDINE *does not join.*

CLINCHPOLE : Very well. If your Honour refuses H. W. Singlebottom on the question of costs, I take my stand on Atkinson 1878.

O. RECEIVER : Which I answer with Watkinson 1889 !

CLINCHPOLE : But *not* if I do not know my aunt is dead !

REGISTRAR (*turning to* BARCALDINE) : Mr. Barcaldine, were you aware of the death of your aunt when you signed the first deed to your father's trustees ?

JIM : Oh, no.

CLINCHPOLE : That, I submit, is Atkinson 1878, and Watkinson 1889 has nothing whatever to do with it.

REGISTRAR : I am afraid I cannot disallow Watkinson 1889 unless you can establish that the debtor was unaware of his aunt's death not only *ipso facto* but *prima facie*.

CLINCHPOLE : I strongly protest against such a ruling.

REGISTRAR : Mr. Barcaldine, supposing you *had* known of your aunt's death, would you

then have signed the original deed to your father's trustees?

JIM: I scarcely know——

REGISTRAR: Exactly. You see, that takes us no further.

CLINCHPOLE: It's the first time I've ever heard——

REGISTRAR: I don't suggest for a moment——

CLINCHPOLE: Then let me put it this way: I know my aunt is dead——

REGISTRAR: But *how* do you know your aunt is dead? You have to show proof.

CLINCHPOLE: I beg your Honour's pardon: my aunt committed a voluntary act in law which does not invoke my right to show proof.

REGISTRAR: How so?

CLINCHPOLE: If my aunt stands on her head I am not under obligation to show proof that I *know* my aunt is standing on her head!

[*The matter has now become one of great gravity.*

REGISTRAR: Not if you *know* your aunt *had* stood on her head. But I have already put this point; you did *not* know. I say to you, *supposing* you had known your aunt had stood on her head, would you then have signed the deed? What is your answer? "You scarcely know." How do you get over that?

CLINCHPOLE: I submit that if I scarcely know whether I would have signed the deed to my father's trustees if I had been then fully aware that my aunt was standing on her head, I would thereupon automatically establish an *ipso facto* condition which is nothing more or less than Atkinson 1878.

O. Receiver : Then I wash my hands.

Registrar : I see Mr. Clinchpole's point, Mr. Rudyard.

O. Receiver : I quite follow, your Honour.

Registrar : It is too intricate a question to formulate a rule without considerable investigation ; if you suggest an adjournment——

Clinchpole : No, no.

O. Receiver : Oh, certainly not.

Registrar : I don't think that this matter is in any way concerned with Mr. Barcaldine's affairs.

O. Receiver : Exactly.

Clinchpole : Precisely.

Registrar : Therefore it seems to me it is not really essential to dwell on it any longer.

O. Receiver : I entirely agree.

Clinchpole : And so do I.

[*It is well to remember that the eloquence and repose of their highly educated voices seem rather like a whiff of old lavender in a slaughter-house.*

Registrar : We've covered everything, I think, Mr. Rudyard.

O. Receiver : Yes, I think so, your Honour.

Registrar : Mr. Barcaldine, you state that you were living well within your income during the sixteen months you occupied your Hyde Park flat.

Jim : I was.

Registrar : Here is an item of £720 for a Straker-Squire car. And you don't suggest that you could afford to pay that amount for a car

upon an income such as yours, even at that time?

JIM: No. As a matter of fact, it was a great bargain. It was practically brand new and they were selling at £900 odd that particular car.

REGISTRAR: I see. Now, we have an account for £182 from the Maison Flourage. These are for dresses for your wife?

JIM: Yes.

REGISTRAR: Your wife and daughter?

JIM: My—my daughter was only a little girl then.

REGISTRAR: Well, we come to this house at Bourne End.

JIM: That is my wife's.

O. RECEIVER: Under deed of gift: schedule twenty-two.

REGISTRAR: Victoria?

O. RECEIVER: Edward!

REGISTRAR: I see. Now the Official Receiver has made a note of your daughter's school fees at St. Hildegarde's at Eastbourne. They certainly seem rather ridiculous.

JIM: Yes; well, we wanted to do our best.

REGISTRAR: Yes; but still, can you tell me that you were training your daughter for some special qualification as a means of livelihood?

JIM: Oh, no.

REGISTRAR: I cannot help feeling that when one considers these individual particulars as a whole, there is a very considerable indication of a certain personal extravagance.

JIM: I don't see it. When we were married, we

both worked for the first few months, and we got into the habit of living up to our income, which was £2 10*s*. a week. We kept that habit, that's all.

REGISTRAR : Yes, I've no doubt. Yet, if you will allow me to say so, life is rather a serious thing, Mr. Barcaldine, and the sooner we all realise this the better.

[BARCALDINE *smiles.*

I see you smile. Believe me, there is nothing to smile at. Now, Mr. Rudyard, I want to get this over before we adjourn. I think we can. (*Glancing at the clock.*)

O. RECEIVER : Certainly. *I* have completed, your Honour.

USHER : Any further creditors ? (*Looking round.*)

[*No response.*

REGISTRAR : Very well. We will return to this private loan from Mr. Rosel. That is the only outstanding matter we have to deal with.

O. RECEIVER : That is so.

CLINCHPOLE : Your Honour, we do not for a moment suggest to the Court that my client had any right to make use of the company's money even for a single hour. We do not do so.

REGISTRAR : That is not the point.

CLINCHPOLE : We are prepared to admit that this was an act of misconduct.

REGISTRAR : Yes, Mr. Clinchpole, it is an act of misconduct as it stands. But I am not prepared to leave it as it stands ; I am going to have this cleared up. Subsequent to the payment of this £700 cheque, Mr. Everitt and Mr. Rosel guaranteed certain of the company's most pressing commitments. Is Mr. Everitt here ?

[Mr. Everitt *stands up. He is an ordinary rat.* Is this so, Mr. Everitt ?

Everitt (*he speaks in a loud, common, and insistent manner*) : I guaranteed the payment of these commitments in conjunction with Mr. Rosel solely on account of a written statement showing the amount standing to the credit of the company at the time. One of these credit items was a cheque for £852 from Mr. H. W. Parker.

Registrar : What do you mean—" a written statement " ?

Everitt : Mr. Rosel had obtained a letter from Mr. Barcaldine saying that he held these amounts.

Registrar : I see ; and you say you would never have entered into this guarantee without such an assurance ?

Everitt : Never ! (*He is most emphatic.*)

Registrar : Then do you suggest that this letter was written in order to obtain such a guarantee ?

Everitt : I do.

Clinchpole : Your Honour, I have had no opportunity to go into this matter.

Registrar : Very probably not. No doubt you recognise the gravity of this development. (*To* Everitt) When you saw this letter——

Everitt : I never saw it ; Mr. Rosel repeated it to me.

Registrar : Is Mr. Rosel here ?

[Rosel *stands up.*

One moment. Mr. Barcaldine, you will understand that this is no longer any question of misconduct, as this word applies in this Court.

JIM : I understand.

REGISTRAR : There is an indication that the depositions in this examination may have to be forwarded to the proper authorities.

JIM : Yes.

O. RECEIVER : Very well, your Honour.

REGISTRAR : Now, sir. Did you, or did you not, write such a letter to Mr. Rosel ?

ROSEL (*shouting*) : No, he didn't. I meant to ask him for it ; I forgot it. I told Mr. Everitt he did, to save time. I'm sorry.

[EVERITT *and nearly everybody else looks up at him.*

REGISTRAR : What ! Told him you had received a letter, to save time.

ROSEL : Yes. It was untrue. It can't be helped.

EVERITT (*turning round*) : But what d'you mean ?

USHER : Silence !

CLINCHPOLE (*rising up in a glorious flood of eloquence*) : Your Honour ! Is my client to stand here and submit to one tissue of lies after another from such men as these ? A more dastardly attempt to blacken a debtor's reputation could scarcely be believed. I ask your Honour, is this Court to have its time wasted by jackals, prairie wolves and poisonous snakes ?

REGISTRAR : Please, please, Mr. Clinchpole !

[ROSEL *has fumbled his way out, closely followed by a yelping pack of wild animals.*

O. RECEIVER : Your Honour, I leave it at that.

REGISTRAR : And so do I. I am very sorry, Mr. Barcaldine, that such an allegation was ever allowed to be even imputed. A most monstrous

accusation ! Due consideration must be made for the free admission of your unwise conduct in one particular and the methods adopted by those with whom your transactions were conducted. The examination is concluded !

[*There is a general movement.*

As BARCALDINE *comes down, he is joined by* CLINCHPOLE, *who claps him on the back as he reaches the door.*

JIM : Now why did that dog do that ?

CLINCHPOLE (*joyously*) : Some dirty work, I'll bet a fiver.

[*They go out.*

USHER (*rising and shouting out to nobody in a loud voice*) : E. W. H. Slavinsky at two-fifteen !

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE X

SCENE : *St. James's Park. This scene should be perfectly beautiful. It is the green grass under a lovely big tree, sloping down to the lake. Across the lake and in the distance is the wonderful dream city that is built up out of the Horse Guards, the War Office and Whitehall Court. Below, the dark greens and the black and violet shadows of the lake. Above, the light white stones away in the distance set in the rosy afterglow that lights the city sky. This set may be small, and even on the "Chauve Souris" principle, but it can still convey the essentials of loveliness and repose.*

TIME : *It is late twilight on a summer evening.*

MABEL BARCALDINE *is sitting on a little green chair.* BARCALDINE *is half lying on the grass. There is another little green chair which no doubt he has used.* BARCALDINE *has his hat off and is aimlessly twisting his stick about as London men do when they sit on the grass.*

MABEL : Why do they call it the Horse Guards, Jim ?

JIM : Well, I suppose the Horse Guards used to use it.

MABEL : It looks lovely, doesn't it ?

JIM : Lovely !

MABEL : And all that's the War Office ?

JIM : Those towers behind are Whitehall Court.

MABEL : Are they ?

JIM : They were built by a gentleman named Mr. Balfour.

MABEL : Just fancy that. Isn't it wonderful what some men do with their lives.

JIM : Yes, my dear, it is. Sermons in stones, that's what those things are !

MABEL : You sure that grass is dry, Jim ?

JIM : Dry as a bit of toast.

MABEL : Think I'll try it. (*She flings herself down on the grass.*)

JIM : That's it. Now why should people sit on chairs when God's green earth is all round ?

MABEL : Jim, your hair is getting thin.

JIM : It is, isn't it ?

MABEL : It is.

JIM : It's too bad.

MABEL : I like that collar. I think it better than those others.

JIM : You think this looks better ?

MABEL : Ever so.

JIM : I'll get some more of 'em.

MABEL : Wear one like that to-morrow when we go and see Mr. Delauney.

JIM : I've only got this one.

MABEL : Well, that'll do all right. Mind you do, Jim.

JIM : Right you are, darling !

MABEL : Why'd you say that ?

JIM : Well, because you are.

MABEL : Why, Jim ?

JIM : I don't know. You and my collars !

MABEL : Poor old Jim !

JIM : I wonder if Delauney will go to twelve guineas.

MABEL : I should think so. A man like that ! Just imagine all he's got to pay away each week.

JIM : They're very often the worst to deal with.

MABEL : This grass *is* a bit damp, Jim.

JIM : Well, then, you get up off it.

MABEL : Well, then, you do too !

JIM : Go on, dear.

MABEL : I shan't unless you do.

JIM : Look. Here he comes.

MABEL : Who ?

JIM : The ticket-collector. They don't miss much.

MABEL : We needn't pay. We're sitting on the grass.

JIM : You're a crook, that's what you are. (*He pulls out some money.*)

MABEL : You're a fool.

JIM : I'm a penny short. He'll have to change half a crown.

MABEL (*taking her bag*) : Here, I've got a penny. You don't want to change half a crown.

JIM : Thanks.

[*An ancient* TICKET-COLLECTOR *comes on from down L.*

Here you are. We've been sitting on the chairs. (*Handing money.*)

TICKET-C. : Thank you, sir.

MABEL : Did you *see* us sitting on the chairs ?

TICKET-C. : Oh, yes, I saw you.

JIM : Of course you did. My wife wanted to do you out of fourpence.

TICKET-C. : You didn't, did you, lady ?

MABEL : Didn't want to do *you*. Wanted to do the Government.

TICKET-C. : That's what they always think, these young ladies !

JIM : Lovely it looks from here, over the lake.

TICKET-C. : Yes, sir. It's a nice view if you've got plenty of time on your hands. Some gentleman said it looks like the East.

JIM : Yes, it does that.

TICKET-C. : Like the East, he said.

JIM : Yes.

TICKET-C. : Well, good night, sir.

JIM : Good night.

MABEL : Good night.

[TICKET-COLLECTOR *goes off up R.*

(*Looking out across the lake*) Lovely, it must be, to see all the East, to travel all over the world !

JIM : Yes, it must be.

MABEL : Wish *we* had, Jim.

JIM : So do I.

MABEL : Did you hear what he said : " These young ladies " !

JIM : Yes. Well, that's all right ; so you are.

MABEL : My word !

JIM : Yes, you are.

MABEL : To you, Jim.

JIM : I should think so.

MABEL : That's the chief thing, isn't it ?

JIM : I was watching you to-night, when you were putting the kid to bed.

MABEL : Were you, Jim ?

JIM : You looked just the same, every bit the same as when——

MABEL : Don't, Jim ! (*She puts her hand on his.*)

[*The bugles begin to blow "Lights out" in the Wellington Barracks.*

JIM : It's after ten !

[*They sit there in complete silence as the long drawn-out, unchanging call passes its way once more.*

MABEL : It's sad, isn't it, Jim ? It seems to go marching on.

JIM : Somehow or other, we all go marching on.

[*They sit there hand in hand.*

CURTAIN

SCENE XI

SCENE : *Delauney's office. Just as in Scene* I, *Act I. The idea is to continue from where the scene ended.*

DELAUNEY : I think, my dear Schloss, we must freely admit that there can be no answer to that.

SCHLOSS : My dear Mr. Delauney, I am unfortunately compelled to agree.

DELAUNEY : This life is full of dreams and romance if one only keeps one's eyes open. One of my best friends flung himself under an underground train because his wife fell in love with an ironmonger's assistant in the Brompton Road.

BARCALDINE : Indeed !

MABEL : I say !

DELAUNEY : Now Schloss has got to invent his stories. Sit down and try and think them out !

Bless my soul, *I* could tell him a few tales if only he'd take the trouble to listen.

SCHLOSS : That's not fair. I've got my ideals to work out. Just things that come to me that I want other people to realise—people like this lady and gentleman here—things that I can't describe. Such things as in the traffic of this world can never come their way.

MABEL : I think that's a very beautiful idea.

DELAUNEY : Oh, yes, it is. It's a fine idea. Schloss is an artist in the real sense of the word. I've always said so.

SCHLOSS : Thank you.

BARCALDINE : I'll try and remember that ; I'm sure my wife will.

MABEL : I will indeed. It's wonderful how you think of all these things. (*She gets up.*)

DELAUNEY : Not a bit of it ! It's our job, isn't it, Schloss ? I'm getting the Russian Players over shortly. You must come to that ; stark life with a throb in it. The real thing !

MABEL : Oh, we'd love to !

DELAUNEY : Now I'll arrange with Goddard and Smith about the agreement. I'll send along my cheque and all will be well.

MABEL : Thank you so much, Mr. Delauney. I'm sure you'll like the place.

DELAUNEY : I'm sure we shall.

BARCALDINE : I'm so glad, Mr. Delauney, and thank you very much for the seats for Friday night.

MABEL : I know we'll enjoy it.

DELAUNEY : I'll send that box to-morrow morning.

BARCALDINE : It's extremely kind of you. Good day, Mr. Schloss. It's been a pleasure to hear you talking.

MABEL : It has indeed !

SCHLOSS : I'm afraid I talk an awful lot of rot. Good-bye, Mrs. Barcaldine. Good-bye, sir.

[*They go up.*

DELAUNEY (*at door*) : We'll keep in touch.

MABEL : Oh, yes, we will. (*Going out.*)

BARCALDINE : Oh, yes, certainly.

DELAUNEY : Good-bye. Turn up the light, Blackford. No, not that one, the other one !

[*They go off.*

(*Turning round to* SCHLOSS) Now that's what you're up against.

SCHLOSS : What ?

DELAUNEY : That's your bloody British public ! Can you beat it ?

SCHLOSS : Perfectly appalling ! They're nice people, too !

DELAUNEY : Of course they are. They simply *don't know*. Those sort of people don't live, my dear chap, they just exist.

SCHLOSS : I know.

DELAUNEY : The things you said just now ; magnificent. It's all right. *We* understand, you and I, but God bless my soul, what's it mean to them ? (*He goes up to his desk and commences to write a cheque out.*)

SCHLOSS : To my mind, it's dreadful, the emptiness of ordinary human life.

DELAUNEY : Don't talk about it.

SCHLOSS : I was only thinking about it this morning. I lay in bed till twelve o'clock thinking about it.

DELAUNEY : Now I've made out a cheque for a hundred pounds on account of fees. I'll send a draft of an agreement ; our new idea. A commission. (*He offers the cheque.*)

[DELAUNEY *picks up scene-model and puts it on desk.*

SCHLOSS : What's all this ?

DELAUNEY : This is your first act. It can be a palace on the Lido, a casino at Le Touquet, or a millionaire's residence in the West End of London. I don't care a damn which, but you've got to make an entrance for Dailia Day as a little penniless, but lovely, creature, who has had nothing to eat for a fortnight.

SCHLOSS : But how ?

DELAUNEY : How ? That's your job. That's what I'm going to pay you for.

SCHLOSS : Right-ho, then ! but why ?

DELAUNEY : Why ? God dammit, why ? Because twenty thousand Barcaldines are booking seats to-night, sir. Because the bands are playing and the lights are up and blazing and there's cash upon deposit if we've got the goods to click. Now :—down the silver staircase we have a revolving back-set. . . .

CURTAIN

THE LADY WITH A LAMP

DEDICATED
TO
EDITH EVANS
ACTRESS

REGINALD BERKELEY

THE LADY WITH A LAMP

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

SCENES I AND II: Embley Park, Hampshire. Summer. Early Nineteenth Century.

WILLIAM NIGHTINGALE
LORD PALMERSTON
SIDNEY HERBERT
MRS. NIGHTINGALE
ELIZABETH HERBERT
HENRY TREMAYNE
SELINA BRACEBRIDGE
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

SCENE III: Harley Street. Six years later.

LADY HERITAGE
MRS. CALDER
LADY CHRISTABEL DEAN
MISS PELT
ELIZABETH HERBERT
MRS. NIGHTINGALE
HENRY TREMAYNE
SIDNEY HERBERT
LORD PALMERSTON
DR. SMITH
A NURSE
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

SCENE IV: Scutari. Winter. First year of the Crimean War.

A SURGEON
SELINA BRACEBRIDGE
CORPORAL JONES
MRS. WILLIAMS
MR. BAMFORD
DR. CUMMING
MR. MACDONALD
DR. SUTHERLAND
NURSE BATES
HENRY TREMAYNE
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

SCENES V AND VI: Old Burlington Street. 1861.

DR. SUTHERLAND
A MAID
ELIZABETH HERBERT
SIDNEY HERBERT
MRS. NIGHTINGALE
LORD PALMERSTON
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

SCENE VII: South Street. Summer, 1886.

A NURSE
DR. SUTHERLAND
ELIZABETH HERBERT
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

SCENE VIII: South Street, 1907.

A PRESSMAN
A NURSE
TANKERTON
"THE TIMES" REPRESENTATIVE
PURSUIVANT
THE SECRETARY OF STATE
THE LORD MAYOR OF LONDON
THE PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN RED CROSS
A GERMAN DIPLOMAT
THE COURT CHAMBERLAIN
A MOTHER AND HER TWO CHILDREN
TWO WOMEN
CRIMEAN VETERANS
ELIZABETH HERBERT
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

ACT I

SCENE I

SCENE : *The terrace at Embley Park, Hampshire, the principal country house of* MR. WILLIAM NIGHTINGALE—*a wide expanse of paved walks and flower-beds with the mullioned windows and gables of the mansion rising sheer on the right as you face it and a marble balustrade and wide flight of steps down to the lawns at the far end. A fountain plays in the foreground.*

The time of the year is summer ; the era, mid-nineteenth century—the late forties, to be more exact.

A small company of people are sitting on the terrace in the golden light of an August afternoon. The rather pugnacious-looking, bewhiskered out-of-doors Englishman lounging easily in a big chair is LORD PALMERSTON, *Foreign Secretary of England, the nightmare of Louis Philippe, the architect of Belgium, and the most respected man in Europe. Despite the comfort of his attitude and the lazy, almost scornful tolerance of his speech there is a certain underlying physical power in his expression and in the contour of his limbs warning those who can read signs that he might spring out of his chair or out of his mental easiness very readily if provoked. As, indeed, he would, for he is physically fit, young for his sixty odd years, and almost contemptuously fearless. He is gifted with what some people consider the highest form of English wisdom—strong common sense ; and, as he possesses a wide command of good, racy, toothsome English and considerable readiness in the use of it, he may stand well enough for the best type of Englishman of his time. Freedom-loving but aristocratic ; humane but sardonic ; pleasure-loving but full of capacity ; unswerving in loyalty to his subordinates ; plain spoken ; intolerant of humbug ; warm-hearted and cool-headed,* HENRY JOHN TEMPLE, VISCOUNT

PALMERSTON, M.P., *is in disfavour with his Queen and her Consort, but very much to the liking of the general public of these islands.*

MR. WILLIAM NIGHTINGALE, *the owner of the house—a slim, bookish fellow, ten years younger than his distinguished guest—labours under the advantage, or disadvantage, according to the point of view, of marriage with a woman of commanding personality and powerful character who is moreover six years his senior and greatly his superior in the arts of life. With their heredity this is hardly remarkable.* MR. NIGHTINGALE, *who is rather proud of his noble birth, began life as a Shore of Tapton—a connection with the family of Lord Teignmouth. He acquired his present name on inheriting the very considerable properties (including a mine of sorts) left by his great-uncle, Peter Nightingale, a Derbyshire squire distinguished among his contemporaries by the name of "Madman" Nightingale—a tribute to his crazy exploits when he was drunk, which seems to have been his normal condition—but otherwise with no claims upon the remembrance of posterity.* MR. NIGHTINGALE *received a gentleman's education at Edinburgh and Cambridge and acquired at these seats of learning the taste for and the habit of amassing the hordes of miscellaneous useless knowledge proper to persons of his station from Prince Consorts down to landed proprietors. But* FANNY NIGHTINGALE, *his wife, is a horse of another colour, as befits the daughter of "King-Killing" Smith of Norwich—the Abolitionist M.P., the friend of Wilberforce, the sturdy Radical.* FANNY NIGHTINGALE, *nearing sixty, is not a Radical—very few women of that age ever are. Perhaps she was never a Radical—the world was too good to her. She had almost unlimited money, two big country houses, the London season, the Paris salons, a wide and always increasing number of rich and powerful friends, a young husband quite happy to be "managed," two gifted daughters—the younger inclined to be self-willed. What does she want with Radicalism? Why*

disturb the order of Society? How foolish to put ideas in people's heads. The Church of England teaches one to do one's duty in the state of life to which it has pleased God to call one; and as it pleased God to call FANNY NIGHTINGALE *to a remarkably delightful state of life she has demonstrated her appreciation of His good taste by joining the Church of England and abjuring the Unitarianism of her "King-Killing" parent. Her husband, also of Unitarian stock, continues for no very obvious reason a supporter of the Unitarian faith. That is unpractical. It's obviously unpractical and theoretical not to do what everyone else does. Otherwise why have a Church of England at all? For* FANNY'S *chief inheritance from the Smiths of Norwich is severe practicality. Above everything she is a practical woman. She is a thoroughly practical and efficient housewife. When she does a kindness, which is very often, she does it in a practical way. She is practically Conservative. And she is practically impatient to the last degree of theories—especially the nonsensical theory of her younger daughter that women ought to be allowed to work for their living. Servants, yes. But gentlewomen? What next? The idea of such a thing!*

And so on this afternoon of August, say 1848 or 1849, MRS. NIGHTINGALE, *a fine, handsome figure of a woman, sits rather severely in a straight-backed chair with a basket of needlework, ready to interject a word of good-humoured but firm correction if her feather-brained irresponsible boy of a husband (he's still only a boy to her—bless his heart!) should say anything "unpractical" to this rather awe-inspiring* LORD PALMERSTON *who, they say, calls himself a "Liberal," whatever that may mean—but who certainly is most attractive (and how romantic to have waited all those years till Lady Cowper was free to marry him!)*

The fourth member of the little group on the terrace is a young man not yet turned forty. He is tall, slightly built for an Englishman of his height, strikingly

handsome in feature, fair-haired, dark-eyed, clean-shaven, with a sensitive fastidious mouth, eyes and brow of a poet, the manner of a leader, and unhappily a vitiating touch of weakness sprung from inherited disease. This is SIDNEY HERBERT, *lately Secretary at War in Sir Robert Peel's administration ; now a private member of Parliament, but belonging to what would be called to-day the "Peelite Shadow Cabinet."* SIDNEY HERBERT *is half Russian ; that is why the stability of his resolves is capable of being shaken. He is brilliant and courageous but wanting in staying power.*

LORD PALMERSTON *has a book in his hand. He has said something provocative, to judge by the expression of the others.*

NIGHTINGALE : But his style is so exaggerated.

HERBERT : I suppose it is.

PALMERSTON (*sturdily*) : So is everything he says. Much is mere rhodomontade. But there are some surprisingly profound things in it.

MRS. NIGHTINGALE (*looking up—it is time for the practical mind to intervene*) : What is the book, Lord Palmerston ?

PALMERSTON : *Past and Present.*

MRS. N. (*with polite indifference*) : Indeed.

PALMERSTON : By the Scotch writer, Carlyle.

MRS. N. : Indeed. I haven't heard of him.

NIGHTINGALE : Oh, Fanny ! Everyone has. He's making a big reputation as a thinker.

MRS. N. : What does he think ?

HERBERT : That everyone ought to work.

MRS. N. (*practical at once*) : That's nonsense. Of course the poor have got to work or they

couldn't live. But you needn't work if you have money. Why should you ?

PALMERSTON : To make more money.

MRS. N. : Do you ?

PALMERSTON : No. Because I don't happen to care very much about money. I work because I like it.

MRS. N. : If you like it, that isn't work. . . . But you're not fair to yourself. You serve the country from a sense of duty, Lord Palmerston.

PALMERSTON (*cynically*) : Only a sense of duty to myself, I'm afraid. . . . I like power ; and I hate idleness.

MRS. N. : Well, if working merely means doing what you like, I really don't see why the author of this book is getting such a big reputation as a thinker.

HERBERT : But that isn't what he means at all, Mrs. Nightingale. He thinks everyone ought to do something useful. He thinks that Labour has a soul——

MRS. N. (*a little chilly*) : We've all got souls, Mr. Herbert, at least I hope so.

PALMERSTON : Nobody grudges Labour a soul. The danger is, if you'll forgive the pleasantry, that it may develop a *heel*—and learn to use it.

HERBERT : Of course. That's exactly Mr. Carlyle's point. Unemployment has been so bad ; and yet the country is so rich. He seems to think they may combine. . . . In fact he urges them to combine.

NIGHTINGALE (*rhetorically*) : And then rob the rich, and live in idleness themselves ! What a

delightful programme ! And when the money's gone, what then ? . . . May I ask how they'd any of them get any work at all, if it wasn't for the rich ?

MRS. N. : This doesn't sound at all a sensible or practical book to me. How did it come into the house, William ?

NIGHTINGALE : I think it belongs to Florence.

MRS. N. : I might have known that without asking. The poor child is not very practical. May I look at it, Lord Palmerston ?

PALMERSTON (*courtly*) : Of course. (*He takes it to her.*) There's a great deal of very skilful research in it. The passages about mediæval England are really well done. But he lets his pen drag him into a jungle of nonsense about modern conditions.

[MRS. NIGHTINGALE *is soon deep in the book with a pucker of perplexity between her eyebrows.*

HERBERT : He's a great man, you know. Quite sound at the bottom. He supported us over the Repeal of the Corn Laws. And he's a staunch free trader.

PALMERSTON : If he supported you in office, my dear Herbert, that naturally excuses everything —until he has the bad taste to disagree with you. . . . In any case, I didn't suggest he was mentally defective. Only a little unbalanced.

NIGHTINGALE (*chuckling*) : He's rather severe on you Liberals.

PALMERSTON : Yes. He says what the Tories would like to say, if they had the intelligence. But we manage to survive—and even attract our opponents. We'll swallow Herbert yet—and his friend Gladstone too. And I daresay

Bobby Peel into the bargain. . . . I was a Conservative myself once.

HERBERT (*silkily*) : Were the claims of office and party a little . . . incompatible ?

PALMERSTON (*good-natured*) : When you sit in my Cabinet, young man, you will remember those words and blush for them.

HERBERT : You intend to be Prime Minister then ?

PALMERSTON : Oh, I think so. I can't afford to win the Derby, and one ought to do one or the other.

HERBERT : Too modest. Why not both ?

PALMERSTON : One must leave some goal for succeeding generations !

MRS. N. (*looking up—and intervening exactly at the right moment*) : . . . This man, when you can make head or tail of what he's driving at, writes absolute nonsense. Half the words I don't know the meaning of and I don't believe anyone else does. But he actually seems to think that it's degrading to be a cotton spinner and a sin to own a factory or mill. People oughtn't to be allowed to publish books like this. It's downright subversive. It amounts to poisoning children's minds ! Why doesn't the Government prevent it, Lord Palmerston ?

PALMERSTON : Well, you know, the Government is rather busy appeasing these violent class differences in preference to accentuating them. There are the Chartists, remember. Besides, you can't interfere with the free expression of opinion.

MRS. N. : Ah, the Chartists. There you are ! A lot of poor misguided people led astray by

scoundrels and traitors. The leaders ought to be put in prison.

NIGHTINGALE : You can't do that. This is the nineteenth century.

PALMERSTON (*grimly*) : Can't you ? Ask Herbert.

HERBERT : It wasn't my province. I was only at the War Office. . . . But I must say in defence of our Conservative policy that these agitators really must be dealt with. Agitators——

[*They have been joined by a lovely dark girl in the early twenties. This is* ELIZABETH HERBERT, *Sidney's recently married wife.*

ELIZABETH : Oh, are you talking about agitators ? We met the sweetest agitators in Rome. Didn't we, Sidney ? So brave and unselfish. All they thought about was the cause.

NIGHTINGALE : What was the cause, Mrs. Herbert ?

ELIZABETH : They did tell us. I'm afraid I've forgotten. But they believed in it tremendously. They were simply splendid.

[*Murmurs of approval.*

PALMERSTON (*sardonically*) : Curious how political revolutionaries are invariably heroes if they happen to be foreigners plotting to overthrow a foreign Government ; and equally invariably scoundrels and traitors if they happen to be Englishmen trying to bring pressure on our own !

MRS. N. : Because our Government is a good Government.

PALMERSTON : Much obliged for the testimonial.

ELIZABETH : Of course they're rather splendid, aren't they ? I mean the way they believe in it

all. . . . What? Oh, you don't think so? (*Abashed.*)

HERBERT : Liz, you're getting into deep water.

MRS. N. : There you are, you see ! The young people of to-day simply don't understand. All this unsettlement is due to the war—but they don't remember the war !

ELIZABETH : Well, is it quite fair to expect us to —when your old war was thirty years ago ?

MRS. N. (*indulgent*) : I know, my dear. But *we* do, you see.

ELIZABETH (*breathlessly*) : Sidney doesn't.

MRS. N. : How could he ? He was only a war baby.

HERBERT (*laughing*) : Really——

MRS. N. : Well, why not ? One has to be born some time. . . . Only we do remember it. We know what happened in France and we don't want it to happen here.

ELIZABETH : But, after all, the French Revolution was their own affair.

MRS. N. : Whose affair ?

ELIZABETH : The French people's.

MRS. N. : My dear . . . you see ! You don't know anything about it. The people of France indeed. It was a lot of Jews.

ELIZABETH : Do you suggest that Robespierre was a Jew ?

MRS. N. : Possibly not. But look at the people at the back of him. Where did the money come from ?

PALMERSTON (*twinkling*) : But they used to call your father "King-Killing" Smith in the House of Commons ! He was the sturdiest revolutionary I ever came across.

MRS. N. : Purely as a matter of principle. Papa was a man of ideas—like my brother Sam. He was the dearest and kindest man ; but if you'd ever lived in his household you'd realise what maddening things ideas can be. Thank goodness William has no ideas.

PALMERSTON : You'll have quite a vigil looking out for their reappearance in your grandchildren.

MRS. N. : In our grandchildren ? If that were all ! The terrible thing is, I'm afraid they're coming out again in Florence.

HERBERT (*serious at once*) : Ah, Florence ! But Florence is different. She's——

ELIZABETH (*mischievously*) : She's the most wonderful woman Sidney ever met. . . . Oo ! Oughtn't I to have said that ?

NIGHTINGALE : Always excepting yourself, Mrs. Herbert. That's understood.

ELIZABETH : Oh, no, I'm not wonderful. I'm only . . . what is it, Sidney ?

HERBERT (*with an embarrassed laugh*) : You're an imp.

ELIZABETH : I'm an imp.

HERBERT : I honestly do think that Miss Nightingale has amazing vision and capacity.

MRS. N. : Thank you, Mr. Herbert. That's the very word I wanted. Amazing ! Exactly what it is. Amazing. Here's a girl with half the men in London dying to marry her, a beautiful home, I suppose I may say reasonably accommodating parents ; and what does she want to do ? To be a duchess ? Oh, no ! To be a political hostess ? Oh, no ! To be an artist even—and I'm sure she

could learn to paint very prettily or play the pianoforte or some other ladylike accomplishment. Oh, no ! That doesn't attract her. She wants to go into Salisbury Hospital as a common hospital nurse. . . . You're quite right, Mr. Herbert. It is amazing !

HERBERT : Well, but she doesn't want to stay there. It's only for training.

MRS. N. : And what is the training ? To see things no lady ought to see and mix with the coarsest, commonest people. You don't know the things that go on in hospitals. The nurses are always intoxicated . . . and that's only a trifle to what happens sometimes !

HERBERT : Surely not !

PALMERSTON : That is true enough, I believe. But if someone like Miss Nightingale took up the whole question, might that not be the beginning of better things ?

NIGHTINGALE : That, my dear, is what I have always said. And you know she has always felt a " call " in that direction.

MRS. N. : A call ! My dear, how can you talk such nonsense ! Calls are things that come to saints, not vapourish young ladies with "ideas."

HERBERT : She looks like a saint.

ELIZABETH (*under her breath*) : And dresses like one. . . . Oo ! I've said the wrong thing again.

MRS. N. (*sadly*) : No, my dear. Unfortunately you've said the right thing. It's perfectly true. I cannot persuade that poor child to take the smallest interest in her clothes. She doesn't care about parties. She is bored by Society. Anyone would think she was love-sick—only she won't look at a man.

ELIZABETH (*a little ashamed of her last remark*) : Well, but it's awfully fine of her, Mrs. Nightingale, really.

MRS. N. : You call it fine. I call it foolish.

HERBERT : I call it fine. I call it magnificent. I believe in Miss Nightingale. I think she is going to do something great—something no one else——

[*He is interrupted by the appearance of three people on the steps leading up to the far end of the terrace from the lawns.*

MRS. N. (*chilly*) : You're oddly enthusiastic about my daughter——

NIGHTINGALE : S'sh, Fanny. Here she is.

[*The three on the steps are a man and two girls. The man is well built, with a fine head, strong features, and commanding personality. His name is* HENRY TREMAYNE. *His age is, say, thirty-two. Nowadays he would be called a millionaire ; for he is one of the richest commoners in England. But the word has not yet been invented. Besides,* HENRY TREMAYNE *did not make his money, nor for that matter did old George Tremayne, his father. They got their vast estates when Henry VIII confiscated the Church lands. A Tremayne made himself sufficiently useful to Thomas Cromwell to merit the award of two abbeys. In the Stuart " troubles " the Tremaynes steered their course with sufficient skill to find themselves with doubled possessions after the Restoration. Peter Tremayne sat for the family seat in the Parliament of Sir Robert Walpole and husbanded his resources (it was never known whether they included a share in the Secret Service money) so judiciously that he was able to acquire two considerable blocks of property in London—a square and a shopping thoroughfare—when they came into the market owing to the gambling losses of the noble proprietor. The*

Tremaynes are untitled because they do not choose to be a "mushroom" creation. Like the Hamonds of Norfolk, they pride themselves now on the fact that there has never been a title in the family though more than once the offer has been refused. George Tremayne cut a figure in London in the day of Beau Brummel, though in later life he retired to his country estates. HENRY TREMAYNE *is a man of leisure—alternating between his big town house in Arlington Street and one or other of his country mansions. With his money and the lack of incentive to work he ought to be a fop or a fool ; but he is neither. He is a young man singularly unspoiled by great possessions, seriously engaged in the study of life.*

The elder of the two women is SELINA BRACEBRIDGE, *the wife of Mr. Charles Bracebridge of Atherstone—a distinguished traveller. The other is* FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE, *younger daughter of the Nightingale family.*

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE *is now a woman of about twenty-eight ; tall, very straight and graceful of figure ; with warm brown hair, not a great deal of it ; delicate complexion ; large grey eyes. She has an oval face not perhaps pretty in the conventional sense, but lit up from within by a kind of radiance ; well marked and well bred features ; high forehead partly hidden by the manner of wearing the hair ; shapely but rather combative nose, mobile lips that can relax into childlike merriment or harden into a thin inexorable line ; firm, rather pointed chin ; fine capable hands.*

The two women are together, arms enlaced, TREMAYNE *a little aloof and self-conscious.*

MRS. N. (*involuntarily—as she takes it in*) : . . . There ! Now isn't that too annoying ?

PALMERSTON : Diana evading a shepherd—with attendant vestal. A charming picture !

ELIZABETH : Only the vestal happens to be a married woman ; and the shepherd looks more like a sheep.

[*The trio on the steps have halted. The two women have turned and are looking back across the park—* TREMAYNE *standing by.*

MRS. N. (*plaintively*) : This is going to be the Shackleford business all over again. That poor boy asked me to help him make an opportunity to propose—and I sent them out for a walk. Somehow she's managed to drag in Selina Bracebridge—though why she should interfere goodness knows. She's taken very good care to have a husband of her own. . . . The end of it will be that girl will never get married at all !

[TREMAYNE, *with rather a formal bow to* FLORENCE, *turns, and goes indoors.*

There, that's exactly what poor Lord Shackleford did two years ago when she refused him. . . . Really, William, dear, your daughter is a little trying.

PALMERSTON : Oh, come ! That's visiting the sins of the children upon the fathers !

NIGHTINGALE : Yes, really, Fanny, she's your daughter too, my love.

MRS. N. : But it is hardly necessary to be profane !

[FLORENCE *and* MRS. BRACEBRIDGE *are unobtrusively stealing away. This, however, is not at all to* MRS. NIGHTINGALE'S *taste. Something must be said about the fiasco of the afternoon. She calls.*

Flo, dear.

FLORENCE (*releasing* SELINA *and joining the party*) : Yes, mamma darling ?

[SELINA *follows.*

MRS. N. : Did you have a nice walk ?

FLORENCE : Ever so nice. We went miles.

MRS. N. : I didn't know Selina was going with you.

FLORENCE : Nor did she. I made her.

MRS. N. : You shouldn't let her tire you out, Selina, dear.

SELINA : Oh, but I love it, Mrs. Nightingale.

MRS. N. (*drily*) : Yes, I daresay. . . . But you shouldn't, all the same. (*Continuing to interrogate* FLORENCE) Where did you go, my love ? Into the woods ?

FLORENCE : No. We went to see my patients.

MRS. N. (*with a wry face*) : I wish you wouldn't use slang, dear. I don't know what you mean.

FLORENCE : I mean my patients, mamma darling. I nurse them.

MRS. N. (*quizzically*) : Dear child. You have such odd fancies. . . . Well, never mind.

PALMERSTON (*interested*) : Tell me, Miss Florence, I'd like to know. What patients are these ?

FLORENCE : Well—there's old Margery Whitty, the postmaster's mother. Asthma. She's as much trouble as a whole wardful of ordinary patients. Then there's one of the ploughmen with a nasty flesh wound. He cut himself with a scythe. That has to be dressed every day. It's right through to the bone.

MRS. N. (*with a shudder*) : Flo, dear, you're not in a butcher's shop.

FLORENCE (*biting her lip at the interruption*) : Well . . . then there's a motherless baby whose father

tries to feed it with meat whenever my back's turned. And there's an old woman with rheumatism whose shoulder has to be rubbed. And there's Dandy. Papa knows about Dandy.

NIGHTINGALE : The shepherd's dog. It broke its foreleg in a trap. Ought to have been destroyed, poor brute.

FLORENCE (*almost forcibly—she is already tenacious of her ideas*) : Why should it be destroyed ? The bone's just as healthy as human bone. It only wants attention.

MRS. N. (*quietly*) : Yes, dear. But you mustn't contradict your father.

FLORENCE (*a foretaste of her blasting irony of later life*) : No, mamma. Paternity's an unanswerable argument !

ELIZABETH (*impulsively*) : . . . Please take me to see your patients, Florence.

FLORENCE (*pleased*) : Of course.

ELIZABETH : Sidney too. He'd be so interested.

FLORENCE (*to* HERBERT) : Would you ?

HERBERT (*seriously*) : I'm interested in all your work, Miss Nightingale.

[*Their eyes meet and are held.*

FLORENCE : . . . Oh, well . . . we'll all go tomorrow morning.

HERBERT : I've a plan. I'll talk to you about it. I want to set up some place for sick people to convalesce. There's nothing of the kind in existence. I want one for my tenants. I've got a bit of land near the sea . . . Liz knows all about it.

ELIZABETH : It's a splendid scheme. They'll all get everything they want.

MRS. N. : How delightful ! I wish we could be assured of receiving the same. . . . Flo dear, what have you done with poor Mr. Tremayne after spoiling his appetite with your . . . patients ?

FLORENCE : I don't know. Where did he go, Selina ?

SELINA : He said something about writing letters.

MRS. N. (*reproachfully*) : Really, darling. He's your father's guest, you know. And you were supposed to be entertaining him.

FLORENCE : . . . I think I was. Very much. He seemed to think it all rather a joke.

NIGHTINGALE (*getting up*) : I'm not altogether surprised at that. . . . I think I'll go and get him a little refreshment.

MRS. N. : I think we might all have a little refreshment. It's tea-time.

[*General movement.*

PALMERSTON : Not for me. I'll stay here if I may.

[MRS. NIGHTINGALE *leads her party into the house.*

FLORENCE *remains.*

FLORENCE : I'm in disgrace. May I stay with you, Lord Palmerston ?

PALMERSTON : I'm flattered.

FLORENCE : I want to ask your advice.

PALMERSTON : I am more flattered. What about ?

FLORENCE : Myself.

PALMERSTON : Pelion upon Ossa ! Command me.

FLORENCE : Isn't it in any way possible for women to have something useful to do in this world ?

PALMERSTON : They have already a certain part to play in securing the continuity of the race ! Whether it is to be considered useful or otherwise depends of course on the tastes and views of the inquirer.

FLORENCE : Must women be limited to one function ?

PALMERSTON : They have their homes.

FLORENCE : Yes. If they want homes. But why should a woman, if she doesn't want to marry, have no choice between becoming a domestic servant and twiddling her fingers in her mother's drawing-room ?

PALMERSTON : There are other things surely.

FLORENCE : She can be a governess. But why shouldn't she make an independent career ? Something useful ?

PALMERSTON : Such as what ?

FLORENCE : Anything. The law. Politics. Business even. . . . In my case—nursing.

PALMERSTON : Why not ?

FLORENCE : You honestly don't think it's silly or wrong or . . . unpractical ?

PALMERSTON : I don't know about the law and politics—but I think nursing is a very fine ambition. . . .

FLORENCE (*overjoyed*) : . . . Oh !

PALMERSTON (*gravely*) : . . . If it is pursued in a serious manner. . . . I'll tell you two things worth remembering. Both elementary and therefore both as a rule forgotten. First, if

you're to get what you want, you must be prepared to wait for it. Secondly, you must be ready to take your chance when it comes. By ready, I mean equipped. Enthusiasm is no good without equipment. Better leave the opportunity and wait for another if you're not equipped. . . . I waited twenty years at the War Office.

FLORENCE : Why ?

PALMERSTON : Because I wasn't trained. Spencer Percival offered to make me Chancellor of the Exchequer before Waterloo—before Austerlitz even. That's a long time ago—nearly forty years. It was a golden opportunity, wasn't it ?

FLORENCE : Marvellous. You were how old—twenty-five ?

PALMERSTON : Just about.

FLORENCE : Why didn't you accept ? It might have led anywhere.

PALMERSTON : For that very reason, Miss Florence. It might have led—anywhere. It would probably have led to complete extinction. I wasn't trained.

FLORENCE : You would have had people in the Department.

PALMERSTON : Not to make my speeches in the House. Nobody but a Fox or a Pitt can hope to make anything but bad speeches at first. I took a junior post in the War Office. And I stayed there. They offered me all kinds of tempting things. Governor-General of India ; Viceroy of Ireland. The Prince Regent tried to persuade me that my real ambition was to go to Jamaica ! But it made no difference ! I stayed where I was until I had thoroughly mastered not only the arts of Parliamentary control, but the mysteries of Departmental Government. And then I knew

it was reasonably certain that no Government could get on for very long without me ; and that is the position to-day. Training. It's all training. . . . That's what *you* ought to do.

FLORENCE : I know. It's what I want to do. I wanted to go to Salisbury Hospital—but they wouldn't let me. . . . I do slip off the chain whenever I can. In Paris, when I'm supposed to be wandering about the Louvre with a catalogue, I'm usually in the clinics of the Sœurs de Charité ! In Italy last year, I managed to spend some time working in the infirmary of a convent. And I've had nearly a month at Kaiserswerth.

PALMERSTON : Germany. That place on the Rhine.

FLORENCE : Yes. . . . There's an achievement ! Wonderful ! It has grown out of a hut in a clergyman's back garden into a huge establishment with hundreds of beds—all because the man had faith. He didn't say : " I wonder if they'll approve of it at home " ; or " Is it quite the right thing for a clergyman to be doing, and I wonder if I oughtn't to be preaching instead of building this house with my own hands." He believed in his mission. And he carried it through. Everyone tried to discourage him. I know exactly what they said. It's all been said to me. One lot said : " You're so brilliant you could be an immense social power, if you took the trouble. You're wasting your time." And another said : " You oughtn't to do this. It's not quite nice for a clergyman. Only coarse, common people are carpenters." And someone else said : " It isn't practical, my dear." But he didn't pay any attention. He just scraped together the money and bought the wood and built the hut and took in a poor wretch who needed treatment. . . . And now look at the place ! Because he had strength and vision.

PALMERSTON : Well, you've strength.

FLORENCE : Do you think that ?

PALMERSTON : What about vision ?

FLORENCE : Ten years ago . . . I think I'd rather not tell you.

PALMERSTON : Why not ?

FLORENCE : Because you'll explain it away. Or laugh perhaps.

PALMERSTON : Certainly not that.

FLORENCE : Ten years ago I was out here on this terrace at night. Quite dark. Suddenly the place looked different. It seemed larger and farther away. All the windows were lit up. There was a confused mob of people by the big doors. They were carrying things inside—like mattresses. Someone with a lamp was walking among the people. . . . And it came on me that I was the woman with the lamp—and that the place was somewhere very far away. And then there was a Voice . . .

PALMERSTON : Over among the people.

FLORENCE : No. Inside me. It rang in my head. It spoke to me. It said : " Be prepared."

PALMERSTON : Have you told anyone ?

FLORENCE : I tried to tell father—of course it was impossible ! He called in mamma. . . .

PALMERSTON : Well ?

FLORENCE : . . . They gave me a dose of castor oil !

PALMERSTON : Well . . . it does sound rather like a mixture of indigestion and the Book of Revelation—doesn't it ?

FLORENCE (*reproachfully*) : You promised not to laugh !

PALMERSTON : I'm not. I'm trying to conceal from myself how greatly you've impressed me.

FLORENCE : . . . What did it mean, Lord Palmerston ?

PALMERSTON : What do you think yourself ?

FLORENCE : I don't know. I can't make up my mind. Sometimes I think it was just a kind of mirage. Sometimes I think I fell asleep and dreamt it. . . . Sometimes I wonder . . . if it was a " call." To do something no one else can do.

PALMERSTON : That's the thing to believe. But don't forget. No amount of goodwill can make up for lack of knowledge. The opportunity is half the battle. But the ability to take it is the other half.

FLORENCE : You've given me what I've never had before. Encouragement. It's so lonely and difficult when no one understands.

PALMERSTON : Go and learn. Go and learn.

FLORENCE : I will. I'll be a man and put away childish things.

[MRS. NIGHTINGALE *appears in the porch. A tolerant smile as she watches them.*

MRS. N. : Florence, dear, don't persecute poor Lord Palmerston with your enthusiasms.

FLORENCE : No—mother.

PALMERSTON (*rising*) : On the contrary, I have been very much interested.

MRS. N. : And amused. Of course. The dear child can be quite entertaining. Do come in, Lord Palmerston. We're getting ready to play a round game.

PALMERSTON : Life in miniature ! (*Good-naturedly*) Yes. I'll play. . . .

[*He goes in with his hostess.*

FLORENCE (*by the fountain*) : I'm right ! I'm right ! I must be right ! And I do see something . . . a great work . . . if God gives me strength. . . .

[*As she stands gazing into the water,* SIDNEY HERBERT *appears round the angle of the house.*

HERBERT : . . . May I come and talk ?

FLORENCE (*starting*) : Oh . . . I thought you were at tea.

HERBERT : I escaped. I thought we could talk about your splendid ambition.

FLORENCE : Oh . . . yes.

HERBERT : I hope you'll stick to it. I'm sure you're right. I'd like to help . . . if I may. . . .

FLORENCE : Let's walk in the garden.

[*They turn and go up the terrace.*

As they are descending the steps, ELIZABETH HERBERT *comes smilingly to the door of the house in search of* SIDNEY. *The smile suddenly fades from her face as she watches them disappear.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

SCENE : *The same terrace by moonlight.*

FLORENCE *alone. She is walking up and down with her hands together. Her lips are moving.*

FLORENCE : . . . these idle dreams. O God, if You have not called me, why is my mind filled with visions of serving You ? If life is only a living death—why torture the mind with hope and hope on disappointed hope ?

[*She pauses by the fountain, ethereal, unearthly. Indistinct voices warn her of intrusion. She melts into the background.*

MRS. N. : Flo-rence. . . . Where is she ?

HERBERT (*following*) : The nymph of Diana pursued by the Prince's courtiers. This is Vergil dressed up in Louis Quatorze.

PALMERSTON (*wheezing*) : Quinze would be more appropriate seeing that we shall all of us inevitably get quinsy in this damp air.

ELIZABETH (*pertly*) : Ha, ha ! Joke !

NIGHTINGALE (*learnedly*) : Not exactly a joke, Mrs. Herbert. Paranomasia.

ELIZABETH : Parano-what ? It was an ordinary pun !

NIGHTINGALE (*condescendingly*) : That *is* paranomasia, Mrs. Herbert.

PALMERSTON : . . . Not to be confused with paranoia, or softening of the brain—a common failing of the pedantic !

MRS. N. (*practically*) : William, have you taken your medicine ?

NIGHTINGALE (*sprightly*) : Yes, my love. . . .

[*They pass on.*

MRS. N. (*bringing up the rear*) : Too annoying. She knew I wanted her to play charades. . . .

[FLORENCE *emerges from her hiding-place and returns to the fountain.*

FLORENCE : Fountain ! Why are we given conflicting natures ? Why can't we all be simple and straightforward like you ? Spirted through a silver jet and falling in beautiful uniform curves. . . . How pleased your mother must be ! . . . O God ! if other people are to think for us and make up our minds why were we given brains of our own ? . . . Fountain, what am I

to do with my life? Is it all immaterial? Does it make no difference whether I try to achieve something for the world or give up the struggle and conform, and settle down and become like all the other women? . . . You say, what do I want? Should I come to you if I knew? . . . You say, it is sweet to be loved and sought in marriage. . . . You say, I could bring my babies here to play and listen to your music. But is the love of men and women to be compared with the service of God? You say that a lover's kiss is the centre-lock of the universe, the very heart of God Himself. . . . Fountain, you have been dallying with the Night. You have been listening to her tales of lovers' joys and you are bewitched. . . .

TREMAYNE (*from the garden*): Miss Florence!

FLORENCE: . . . Who's that?

TREMAYNE (*appearing*): Alone? I thought I heard voices.

FLORENCE: You heard mine. I was talking to the fountain. He's an old friend. I tell him all my secrets.

TREMAYNE: Would he let me tell him mine?

FLORENCE: Ask.

TREMAYNE: Fountain. Are you listening?

FLORENCE: He is listening.

TREMAYNE: Fountain, may I come to you for counsel in my difficulty?

FLORENCE: He says: Speak on.

TREMAYNE: Fountain, there is a woman. . . . And she is so noble and her thoughts are so lofty and her nature is so beautiful that I am almost afraid to approach her. . . .

FLORENCE : The fountain says : What do you know of her nature ?

TREMAYNE : Fountain, it shines in her eyes ; it glows upon her face ; it proclaims itself in every inflection of her voice.

FLORENCE : The fountain says that eyes can deceive and faces can lie and that the tongue of woman is a snare for fools.

TREMAYNE : The fountain is . . . harsh.

FLORENCE : The fountain is wise. . . . Shall we go indoors ?

TREMAYNE : Not yet. . . . I've been trying all day to be with you alone.

FLORENCE : I have been trying to avoid it.

TREMAYNE : Why ?

FLORENCE : The instinct of self-preservation, I suppose.

TREMAYNE : That sounds like a wild nature fleeing from civilisation.

FLORENCE : Isn't it more like civilisation shrinking from wild nature ?

TREMAYNE : The cave-man and his stone axe. Am I like that ?

FLORENCE : Did I say I was running away from you ?

TREMAYNE : I thought that was implied.

FLORENCE : Not by me.

TREMAYNE : . . . Fountain, you were right about the tongue of woman. It is indeed a snare for fools.

FLORENCE (*penitent*) : The fountain says that the fault is with the woman.

TREMAYNE : Tell me, O fountain, from whom she fled.

FLORENCE : The fountain says she was running away from herself.

TREMAYNE : . . . Florence !

FLORENCE : No. . . .

TREMAYNE : Florence, I'm in love with you.

FLORENCE : No, please. I didn't mean it in that way.

TREMAYNE : . . . I want you to marry me. . . . You're not in love with someone else ?

FLORENCE : No.

TREMAYNE : Then you . . . will ?

FLORENCE : I can't.

TREMAYNE : There's no such word.

FLORENCE : You're right. I mean : No !

TREMAYNE : Is there a reason ?

FLORENCE : Yes.

TREMAYNE : Want of . . . inclination ?

FLORENCE : . . . Not that.

TREMAYNE : You do care a little ?

FLORENCE : You know I do . . . Henry.

TREMAYNE : I didn't. I hoped. . . . Oh, my dear, I'm so glad. (*He takes her hands.*) You'll marry me, my dear ?

[*She is silent.*

You'll marry me ? I'll see your father to-night. . . . He can't object—I'm disgracefully rich, you know.

FLORENCE : That doesn't count.

TREMAYNE : Not with you. It must with a father.

FLORENCE (*softly*) : Is marriage a purchase in the slave-market ?

TREMAYNE : Florence ! It only means that you can have anything in the world you wish.

FLORENCE : Except freedom !

TREMAYNE : Freedom for what, dear ? You can't be married and free, can you ?

FLORENCE (*moving away*) : Fountain, will men never understand that women can want something more than passion and luxury ? That they want the same freedom as men to direct their own lives and use their own brains ? That however much they may desire a mate they can be conscious of higher purposes than mating ?

TREMAYNE : The fountain says that there is no higher purpose than mating.

FLORENCE : Yes. It said the same to me a few minutes ago.

TREMAYNE : And it said the truth. . . . Florence, you're tormenting yourself with shadows and phantoms.

FLORENCE : I'm not. I believe there's something enormously greater in life than sex and the satisfaction of desire.

TREMAYNE : Do you see no more in love than that ?

FLORENCE : Not unless it is accompanied by sacrifice.

TREMAYNE : I can't pit my wits against yours. I don't want to. This is not a question of intellect ; it is a question of instinct. I can only say to you,

Florence, I love you; and my children are calling to you to give them life.

FLORENCE: No, no, that's unfair. You know how I love children.

TREMAYNE: I know how I should love yours.

FLORENCE: I must forgo that—to do my work.

TREMAYNE: If you bring up happy children into fine men and women, aren't you doing a noble thing? Isn't it the noblest work a woman can do? (*Suddenly taking her in his arms*) Ah, won't you listen to me? I'll devote my whole life to you. I'll fill your life with everything that is beautiful and that gives you happiness. You shall reign over me and all my possessions as if you were a queen. (*Kissing her.*) Because I love you, love you, love you.

FLORENCE (*fighting herself free*): No, Henry, no. I won't surrender. It would be like treachery!

TREMAYNE: What do you mean by that?

FLORENCE: It would be unforgivable. I have had a call.

TREMAYNE: How—a call? To be a nun?

FLORENCE: Something that tells me to be prepared.

TREMAYNE: You mean your hospital nursing? But that's not a call, Flo. It's unbalanced!

[*She is silent.*

Darling, a year of marriage and all this visionary nonsense would be out of your head—driven out by the sanity and simplicity of your own home and nursery.

FLORENCE (*shaking her head*): It's a call, Henry.

TREMAYNE (*standing back*): Florence, I tell you that your call is a delusion. My call to you is the

voice of Nature. The call that is as old as Creation. The call that sounds in the forests and the prairies ; among the mountains and on the plains. That is older than the human race and wider than the human race.

FLORENCE : But not higher.

TREMAYNE : Higher and deeper. The forefather of humanity and its ultimate end. The beginning and the purpose of life. The call of Race.

FLORENCE : Henry, for God's sake, don't persuade me against my will. Don't enlist my body against my soul.

TREMAYNE : You love me.

FLORENCE : Yes.

TREMAYNE : Beyond everything else ?

FLORENCE : Infinitely.

TREMAYNE : You will marry me, Florence ?

[*She is silent.*

Florence, don't torment me.

FLORENCE : It's you who are torturing me.

TREMAYNE : I hold you to what you have said. You love me.

FLORENCE : I do. But that's all. It can't be more than that.

TREMAYNE : It shall be more than that. You'll be my wife, Florence. You can't refuse.

FLORENCE : Let me go. I must refuse.

TREMAYNE : You shall not refuse. You will marry me. (*About to kiss her.*)

FLORENCE : No ! (*Gaining strength*) I shall never marry. I have faith in my call.

TREMAYNE : Dearest, your call is only a mocking echo of your imagination. What sign have you of any call ?

FLORENCE : I don't know.

TREMAYNE : None ! You've no sign. How could there be a sign ?

[*A little pause.*

FLORENCE (*hardly daring to believe her own words*) : But there *is* a sign. . . . Henry. . . . Don't you see . . . Look . . . the people.

TREMAYNE : There are no people.

FLORENCE (*rising transfigured*) : There are multitudes of people wrestling with Death. And there is a place for me among them. . . . God, sanctify my hands for this appointed work, strengthen my spirit to be steadfast in preparing, and firm to reject temptation to turn aside.

TREMAYNE : Florence !

FLORENCE : . . . Take the sacrifice of our love that I may be free for this service.

TREMAYNE : Florence, don't say that. Take it back.

FLORENCE : And give us friendship, O God, and courage—both of us.

TREMAYNE : . . . Amen.

[*He drops on his knee beside her, bending over her hand as one might to a saint.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

END OF ACT I

SCENE III

SCENE : *A room in Harley Street, furnished as the superintendent's office in a nursing-home.*

The LADIES' COMMITTEE, *consisting of* LADY HERITAGE, MRS. CALDER, LADY CHRISTABEL DEAN *and* MISS PELT, *with* MRS. SIDNEY HERBERT *in the chair, is in session.* FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE, *nominally their employée but in reality their controller, is coaxing them through the business of the day.*

Six years have passed since the scene at Embley. FLORENCE *is now, at thirty-four, rather severe-looking and ascetic. She is still beautiful, but with the beauty of the cloister.* ELIZABETH HERBERT *has grown from a kittenish girl into a gifted and charming woman.*

ELIZABETH (*rather diffidently*) : Well—the question is the appointment of a House Surgeon . . . (*To* LADY HERITAGE *beside her*) What ! I beg your pardon ?

[*A whispered colloquy between them.*

LADY CHRISTABEL : Is there—er—a list of recommendations, Miss Nightingale ?

[FLORENCE *goes to her.*

MISS PELT (*a forbidding spinster, addressing her neighbour,* MRS. CALDER) : . . . Bad news again in the Crimea !

MRS. CALDER : So I see in *The Times*. Isn't it too tragic? The poor fellows dying like flies. That terrible battle of the Alma too !

MISS PELT (*firmly*) : It was a great mistake ever to go into the Crimea. If Lord Palmerston had

been at the Foreign Office those wicked Russians would have known better than to fight.

ELIZABETH (*intervening*) : About the House Surgeon. Miss Nightingale will say something.

ALL (*comfortably*) : How very interesting. Oh, yes. Charming, etc.

FLORENCE : I only want to emphasise the great importance of appointing someone who will dispense all our medicines.

LADY HERITAGE (*uneasily*) : Do you mean mix them—like a chemist ?

FLORENCE : Dispense them. Yes !

MRS. C. : Oh . . . but shall we get a gentleman if he has to do that ? I mean of course I know we all remember when the doctor used to come to the back door like any other tradesman. But—er—that's a thing of the past, isn't it ? And—er—nowadays there are some quite nice young men taking up medicine. And I mean it is important to get a gentleman, isn't it? And wouldn't it be a handicap to us in—er—getting the right sort of—er—right sort if he had to mix up his medicines like a common apothecary ? I mean—what ?

LADY C. : Yes, I see your point.

MISS PELT (*judiciously*) : Quite. Quite.

FLORENCE (*firmly*) : It means a saving of a hundred and fifty a year on our druggist's bill—and if it doesn't hurt me to empty the slops it won't hurt the doctor to dispense his own medicines.

LADY H. (*concerned*) : But, dear Miss Nightingale, there isn't the slightest necessity for you to—er—perform these menial tasks. That's what the nurses are for.

FLORENCE (*simply*) : I am a nurse, Lady Heritage.

LADY H. (*a little put out*) : Oh yes, of course, in a way I know.

FLORENCE : No. Not in *a* way. In the only proper way. In being able to do any job in the place better than any of my staff.

LADY H. (*huffily*) : Yes, I know.

ELIZABETH (*tactfully intervening*) : Aren't we getting rather far from the House Surgeon ?

LADY C. : What—er—do the Medical Advisory Committee think of Miss Nightingale's proposal ?

FLORENCE : They've passed it . . . It's far more their proposal than mine.

MISS PELT : Well, if the medical gentlemen think so themselves——

ELIZABETH (*hurriedly*) : Then may we agree to that ? . . . Any objection ?

[*A brooding silence.*

Then that's agreed . . . Miss Nightingale, will you put it in the proper form in the minute book ?

[FLORENCE *and* ELIZABETH *confer together.*

MISS PELT (*turning to* MRS. CALDER *again*) : . . . The Government has been disgracefully casual and slack about the war.

MRS. C. : I hear the state of things at the front is a scandal.

MISS PELT : I know what *I'd* do if *I* were Commander-in-Chief. I'd——

ELIZABETH (*breaking in again*) : Now we've got to consider the Lady Superintendent's Report.

ALL (*purring*) : Yes. Certainly. Of course, etc.

ELIZABETH : Most of it we know about already. The most interesting thing is that Miss Nightingale has succeeded in bringing down expenses from one and tenpence to a shilling a head a day.

LADY H. (*making handsome amends*) : Very satisfactory. Most satisfactory. That means a saving of tenpence a head a day. I—er—I really think we ought to pass a resolution congratulating the Lady Superintendent on—er—this—er—this striking achievement.

ELIZABETH : Is that carried ? (*No opposition.*) I will enter that on the minutes.

FLORENCE (*protesting*) : Before you do that you really ought to investigate the report. For all you know I may have effected the economies by starving the patients.

LADY C. (*condescendingly*) : You see we know you, Miss Nightingale.

[ELIZABETH HERBERT *continues her labours.*

MRS. C. (*to* MISS PELT) : . . . Poor Lady Swinford has lost her boy, you know.

MISS PELT : Killed ?

MRS. C. : Died of wounds.

MISS PELT : And young Captain Fairmile has been killed. And both the Lennoxes are wounded. The casualties at the Alma were terrible. Butchery ! The sick are in a dreadful state. . . . They ought to send out nurses.

MRS. C. : They say Raglan's no good at all in command.

MISS PELT : Really ? He ought to be. Why he was A.D.C. to Duke of Wellington at Waterloo !

ELIZABETH : . . . Our last item is not on the paper. It is proposed to allow the Lady Superintendent fifty pounds a month to be spent on the Institute. It has been sanctioned by the Finance Committee. And——

FLORENCE : But, please! It has not been sanctioned by me and couldn't be sanctioned by me. It is unnecessary. I've ample means of my own to meet any unexpected calls.

LADY H. : But why should you spend your money?

FLORENCE : Why should we spend other people's money? Besides, this isn't the time. If there's money to spare why not give it to the funds for the wounded in the Crimea?

ELIZABETH (*unenthusiastic*) : Oh, but the Government has ample resources.

FLORENCE : Yes, but will it use them?

ELIZABETH : Are you taking sides . . . with the *newspapers*?

FLORENCE : Certainly not. But——

MISS PELT (*interrupting*) : Well, I am. Of course I quite understand, Mrs. Herbert, that with Mr. Herbert's position at the War Office you are in a difficulty. But it seems to me the war is being scandalously mismanaged——

ELIZABETH (*with admirable control*) : That isn't the point, Miss Pelt. The question is whether this Institute ought to subscribe to the Relief Funds. That is Miss Nightingale's proposal.

FLORENCE : Not at all. The Committee proposes to spend unnecessary sums on this Institute. I say don't—but if you must spend money spend it on the wounded soldiers.

MISS PELT : Well, I'll make the proposal.

ELIZABETH (*sweetly*) : It wouldn't be in order, I'm afraid. It wants notice. The question is that the other proposal be withdrawn. Is that agreed?

[*No opposition.*

Then that is all for to-day.

[*Polite murmurs of farewell as the others leave* ELIZABETH *and* FLORENCE *together.*

FLORENCE : Will you sign the minute book?

ELIZABETH (*as she does so*) : Flo, how could you take sides against Sidney?

FLORENCE : Liz, dear, do be reasonable. Nobody supposes the muddle in the Crimea is Sidney's fault.

ELIZABETH : He's the responsible Minister.

FLORENCE : No. It's the Duke of Newcastle. And of course really it's the medical department of the War Office.

ELIZABETH : It's so easy to criticise!

FLORENCE : I know. I don't want to criticise. I want to do something.

ELIZABETH (*good-naturedly*) : Florence, *dear!* What could you do?

FLORENCE : Nurse.

ELIZABETH : Nurses aren't allowed in the army.

FLORENCE : Well . . . Lady Maria Forester wants me to organise a small party of nurses. She and I are providing the money. We shall be no expense to the country.

ELIZABETH : Do you mean you're going to desert us here? Oh, Flo darling, you know your mother's right. You are a bit unpractical.

FLORENCE : I can't go if you hold me here, of

course. Indeed it must be something more than mere consent. Otherwise I'm tied . . . I couldn't raise it this morning because I wanted to tell you first.

ELIZABETH : Of course. I know . . . Flo darling, it's splendid of you. But you can't just arrive in Scutari with a pair of nurses tucked under your arm. . . . And what about your people ? Will they allow it ?

FLORENCE : Uncle Sam has gone to see them. . . . But I don't think I can let them interfere.

ELIZABETH : Dear, if you've made up your mind in advance it isn't much good discussing it.

FLORENCE : I wanted so much to know what Mr. Herbert would think.

ELIZABETH : . . . Sidney ? You know what Sidney is. You know how he admires your work. Of course he'd say yes . . . I want to say yes, too, Florence—only it all seems so vague.

FLORENCE : A thing that is done for the first time is apt to be a little vague at the beginning.

ELIZABETH : . . . I'm afraid. I don't know why. It's a fine plan. It's worthy of you—I can't say more . . . and yet I'm afraid. . . . If I didn't love you and believe in you so much I should tell Sidney not to have anything to do with it.

FLORENCE : I wonder why.

ELIZABETH : If I knew that I should know what to do.

FLORENCE : You wouldn't let . . . your private feelings stand in the way of . . . ?

ELIZABETH : Oh, yes, I would. I'm not a saint, like you. I'm a woman. If I thought it was

going to hurt Sidney, I wouldn't care tuppence about other people or causes or abstractions or anything.

FLORENCE : Well, one comfort is it can't hurt Sidney—my going to the Crimea.

ELIZABETH (*unconvinced*) : No . . . I don't know why I feel so uneasy about it.

[*The door is opened and* MRS. NIGHTINGALE *enters*.

MRS. N. (*without wasting time in greetings*) : Flo—what is this nonsense I hear from Uncle Sam ? It's impossible, my dear.

FLORENCE : It isn't at all impossible.

MRS. N. : Oh, but, my dear, it is. Quite, quite impossible. Good gracious. How can you expect us to consent to your going all through a war entirely unprotected ? A soldier's camp isn't a drawing-room, my dear, you know. . . . Mrs. Herbert, surely you see that, don't you ?

ELIZABETH : Yes . . . but I'm not going to interfere.

FLORENCE : If they're good enough to fight, they're good enough to be cared for.

MRS. N. : Well, I can only say this. We can't prevent you from going if you choose to go. But we can tell you plainly that we disapprove.

FLORENCE : Disapprove of a mission to ease the suffering of the sick and wounded ?

MRS. N. : Good gracious. Do you let yourself be carried away by every newspaper agitation ?

FLORENCE : The state of the wounded isn't newspaper agitation. It's common knowledge.

MRS. N. : But—why should you interfere ? Are you a sort of Messiah ? It isn't very modest

of you, Flo dear. I don't know where you get it from. It makes your father and me feel like a pair of ducks who've hatched a wild swan.

FLORENCE (*unable to resist the retort*) : You're sure you don't mean geese, mamma ? (*But she softens it with an affectionate squeeze of the hand.*)

ELIZABETH (*pained nevertheless*) : Flo . . . darling !

MRS. N. : No, no. She doesn't mean that. That's only Flo's fun.

FLORENCE : I do wish other people would occasionally see things through my eyes.

MRS. N. (*pleading*) : Flo dear, you must admit that your father and I have been very considerate. We allowed you to come in here and your father gave you an allowance as though you were a boy. It isn't very fair to reward us by asking to go off with a couple of nurses picked up from anywhere and plunge into Asia Minor, and for all we know get kidnapped and end in somebody's seraglio. Young English girls don't do these things.

FLORENCE : French girls do.

MRS. N. : Oh, French !

FLORENCE : Sisters of Charity.

MRS. N. : But that's quite different. They are nuns.

FLORENCE : Well, I suppose a nun can be kidnapped as easily as a hospital nurse.

MRS. N. : Dear, I wish you wouldn't be flippant about nuns ! . . . And that's quite a different thing. I can't explain why ; but it is. Oh ! You're so . . . unpractical, dear.

[*A* NURSE *taps at the door and enters.*

FLORENCE : Yes ?

NURSE : A gentleman has called. Mr. Tremayne.

FLORENCE : I'll ring when I'm ready.

[*The* NURSE *departs.*

MRS. N. : Now that's much more sensible, Flo. Dear Mr. Tremayne. We won't keep you. . . . Dear me, it's very nice of him after the way you behaved to him.

FLORENCE : Henry Tremayne and I are friends, mother.

MRS. N. : Yes, dear. Well, there's no reason why you shouldn't go on being friends if—— (*An eloquent pause.*) I'm sure your father and I are great friends. . . . It would be so much more sensible than—well, I won't say any more just now. (*To* ELIZABETH.) Will you come with me to the post office ? I want some stamps.

FLORENCE : You'll come back, Liz, won't you ? We've some work here and I must talk to you.

ELIZABETH : Yes, I'll come back. Darling, try to do what your mother wants !

[*They go.*

FLORENCE, *at her desk, covers her eyes with her hand.*

FLORENCE (*aloud*) : . . . Oh—what is the right thing to do ? . . .

[*A little pause. Then wearily uncovering her eyes, she strikes the bell. The* NURSE *enters.*

I'll see Mr. Tremayne.

[*The* NURSE *goes, and returns a moment later ushering in* HENRY TREMAYNE. *Six years have hardly changed him.*

Come in, Henry. I'm glad to see you.

TREMAYNE : It's nearly a year. I've been travelling.

FLORENCE : Fun ! Where ?

TREMAYNE : The desert.

FLORENCE : Interesting ! But rather solitary, I suppose.

TREMAYNE : One place is very like another when you're running away from the unattainable.

FLORENCE (*with a touch of reproach*) : Henry, you're talking like a love-sick schoolboy—and you must be forty years of age. I'm thirty-four, my friend.

TREMAYNE : Are you happy ?

FLORENCE : I'm busy—and that's much better.

TREMAYNE : Florence, I haven't said a word to you about marriage since that night by the fountain. You asked me to be a friend and I've tried to be one . . . for nearly six years.

FLORENCE : You've been very wonderful. Your letters have helped me in every way. Your visits have always brought me strength. . . . Henry, you're not going to change all that and spoil our friendship ?

TREMAYNE : But I've given up six years for your . . . vision, as you call it, to materialise. You don't suggest that *this* is the great career to which you were called ?

FLORENCE : Don't make fun of it, Henry. It's a beginning. And, anyhow, it's better to be working, even in these restricted surroundings, than lounging about London and yawning and " dropping in " on other idle women to gossip away the morning : and doing crochet and wasting every minute of the day.

TREMAYNE : I don't say not. But it doesn't lead anywhere.

FLORENCE : I'm not so sure. I'm trying to arrange to go out to the Crimea.

TREMAYNE : How ?

FLORENCE : As a nurse !

TREMAYNE : . . . But there aren't any nurses, Flo !

FLORENCE : Well, I should be one. And I think I can get funds to take out a couple more.

TREMAYNE (*aghast*) : What ? Privately ?

FLORENCE : Why not ?

TREMAYNE : Why not ? I never heard of a more hare-brained idea. You'd have no standing. Do you suppose the military authorities are going to have unofficial civilians intruding into their hospitals ? They can't ! They're under War Office regulation. . . . The thing's absurd !

FLORENCE : We shall have letters of introduction to the Embassy.

TREMAYNE : Yes, at Constantinople. That's not the seat of war.

FLORENCE : Scutari, where the hospitals are, is only a suburb of Constantinople.

TREMAYNE : But it's under military control, my dear. The Ambassador has no power there. And if he has, do you suppose he'd use it ?

FLORENCE : He has special powers from the Government.

TREMAYNE : But he can't override the military authorities ! And if he could, he wouldn't for an unknown woman. I'll tell you exactly what he will do. He'll tell his wife to have you to afternoon tea and an evening party or two. And everyone will be charming until you try to do something—and then everyone will freeze, and obstacles will spring up all round you and you'll find yourself faced wherever you look with a blank official wall. . . . Don't think of it,

Florence. You'd only succeed in branding yourself as a crank and a nuisance. Do be advised, my dear. Remember I was in the Diplomatic Service for three years. The public departments don't encourage amateurs—especially amateurs who want to get things done and know how to do them.

FLORENCE (*stubborn*) : I don't care. I believe as firmly as ever in my call to service.

TREMAYNE : There are people who believe the earth is flat, and obstinately persist in doing so in spite of all evidence to the contrary. . . .

FLORENCE : Henry, *you* don't doubt me ?

TREMAYNE : Just consider. You've spent all your youth chasing shadows. You've hunted yourself from hospital to hospital. And what have you achieved ?

FLORENCE : Knowledge.

TREMAYNE : Ah, but you can't pretend that there aren't hundreds of women just as capable as you of running *this* place.

FLORENCE : This isn't my real work. It's only a stepping-stone.

TREMAYNE : Well, make it one. And let me help you ?

FLORENCE : How ?

TREMAYNE : I'll tell you. Choose your site. I'll build and endow a small hospital for you. An English Kaiserswerth ; like the place you went to in Germany. That would realise your dreams. And we'll do it together. Honestly. I'll work it out with you stone by stone. You shall be head of the whole thing, and we'll devote our two lives to the work.

FLORENCE : But, Henry, you can't do work like

mine as the spare time occupation of a married woman !

TREMAYNE : I sometimes wonder if you've any feelings at all !

FLORENCE : Do you ? Is that quite fair ?

TREMAYNE : You meet everything I say with such beautifully rounded excuses.

FLORENCE : . . . Do you think it's easy for me to say " No " ? Do you imagine I don't suffer ? Can't you realise—oh, what's the good of trying to make men understand ?

TREMAYNE : Please, Florence! I've always known you're a saint.

FLORENCE (*harshly*) : Saint ! A tortured ascetic ! The world's idea of holiness. That's your idea about me !

TREMAYNE : Not tortured, my dear.

FLORENCE : Why not ? Do you suppose it isn't torture to have a passional nature and be unable to appease it ? But you can't, Henry ! You've got to choose. If you let sex blur your mind—good-bye to any work that's worth doing. Oh, my God, it's difficult ! . . . I'm talking like someone . . . not quite nice.

TREMAYNE : Darling—I don't know what to say. I don't want to over-persuade you—but——

FLORENCE : I shan't let you do that, Henry.

TREMAYNE : Are you so sure of yourself ?

FLORENCE : Perfectly. You don't think I could discuss all this if I wasn't.

TREMAYNE : . . . Well, don't dismiss my idea offhand. Take a little time to think. Your parents will be happy. You'll be happy. I'll be happy.

FLORENCE : What about the wounded in the Crimea ? Do you suppose they'll be happy ?

TREMAYNE (*impatiently*) : But the Government will deal with that. It's their job, not yours.

FLORENCE : Everyone says so. But the wounded continue to die of neglect.

TREMAYNE : Florence, what earthly good do you suppose one woman could do out there in the turmoil of a war ? These things are inseparable from war. The soldiers tell you that themselves. As for you trying to grapple with a thing that size—it's like trying to cleanse the Augean Stables with a feather duster.

FLORENCE : Faith can do bigger things than that. I believe that my hour has struck and that my appointed work is ready . . .

TREMAYNE (*despairingly*) : Well, if you must run your head against a wall . . . How are you going to begin, dear ?

FLORENCE (*simply*) : I shall be shown the way.

[*A tap on the door. The* NURSE *looks in.*

What is it ?

NURSE : I'm sorry to disturb you. Mr. Sidney Herbert is here with two other gentlemen. It's urgent.

FLORENCE (*coming to earth*) : . . . I must see them, Henry. His wife's on my committee here. He takes a great interest. I suppose it's the new House Surgeon. . . . Bring them in.

[*The* NURSE *departs.*

TREMAYNE : I'll go then. Will you think over my hospital scheme ?

FLORENCE : No, Henry. . . . I'm sorry.

TREMAYNE : Good-bye ! . . . I don't suppose I shall see you . . . for a long time.

FLORENCE : Are you going away again ?

TREMAYNE : Yes.

FLORENCE : Travelling ?

TREMAYNE : In a sense.

FLORENCE (*apprehensively*) : . . . What is it, Henry ? You're not—— ?

[*But before she can finish her sentence the door has been thrown open and her visitors are in the room.*

Mr. Herbert . . . Lord Palmerston ! . . .

[*In the interchange of greetings* TREMAYNE *unobtrusively takes himself away.*

HERBERT *and* PALMERSTON *we already know. Six years have aged the latter without affecting his robust look of health. You would hardly guess him for seventy—the less inasmuch as the glossy bloom of his whiskers lends support to the current rumour that they are dyed.* HERBERT *is thin and haggard. The strain of office is already beginning to tell on an indifferent constitution. Their companion is a bland middle-aged man—unmistakably an official.*

PALMERSTON : I'm glad to see you've persevered in your ambition.

FLORENCE : Oh, yes. We work hard here. Don't we, Mr. Herbert ?

HERBERT : Liz is never tired of singing your praises.

FLORENCE (warmly) : She makes the work possible. From committees and charitable busybodies, Good Lord deliver us !

PALMERSTON (*keenly*) : But you don't quarrel with the committees, I hope ?

FLORENCE : No, I manage them. Mix in a committee room with a seasoning of statistics. Add expert opinion to taste. Stir in a little

common sense. Simmer for a few hours . . . and leave it to set in a cool place.

PALMERSTON : H'm ! Sounds rather like the Cabinet. Especially the simmering part. (*To* HERBERT) Yes. She knows how to get things done.

FLORENCE: Have you come to inspect ?

HERBERT : No. We want to talk to you.

PALMERSTON : Have you been following events in the war ?

FLORENCE : In the newspapers. Yes.

PALMERSTON : You've read the articles in *The Times* ?

FLORENCE : Yes. I suppose they're exaggerated ?

PALMERSTON : Well, I'm not so sure. They must have a foundation.

FLORENCE : Why don't we send out nurses ? The French have them. My old friends the Sœurs de Charité of Paris have all gone out.

HERBERT : That's the point.

FLORENCE : I've heard from Lady Maria Forester—a suggestion that she and I should do something. I think you know about it, Lord Palmerston. You were going to write to the Ambassador, she said.

PALMERSTON : I said I'd get Lord Clarendon to write ! But perhaps that won't be necessary. I don't really think Lady Maria's plan is feasible.

FLORENCE : Everyone talks about what is " feasible." And meanwhile the wounded are dying of exposure.

HERBERT : Wait.

FLORENCE : . . . But is the Government to do nothing ?

HERBERT : By no means. . . . I ought to explain that this gentleman with us is Dr. Andrew Smith, the Director of the Army Medical Department.

FLORENCE : Oh, yes. How do you do ?

SMITH : . . . d'you do ?

HERBERT : The Government has decided that this question ought not to be left to private generosity and initiative. It is an innovation in the Army, but we intend to organise and send out a corps of nurses to the base hospitals.

FLORENCE : That's a fine decision.

HERBERT : Of course the difficulties are enormous because everything has to be improvised. We want your help. Dr. Smith will give you the details.

FLORENCE : Yes, of course. You want me to advise you where to look for the nurses.

PALMERSTON : No. The standard of general knowledge in the Cabinet admittedly is not high ; but we flatter ourselves we know where to look for the nurses. What we don't know where to find—if you won't help us—is a creative organising brain that will get results.

FLORENCE : . . . What ?

HERBERT : We want a woman of great experience, proved character and the highest attainments, to go out with the nurses to the seat of war—take them out, in fact, and reorganise the whole hospital administration.

FLORENCE : . . . Me ?

PALMERSTON : Yes, you. . . . What do you say ?

SMITH (*cutting in before she can reply*) : It's a task not to be undertaken lightly. Where the Medical Staff and resources of the War Office have—er

—encountered difficulties—a woman can hardly hope to do very much.

FLORENCE : If she sets out in that spirit she can't hope to do anything !

HERBERT (*defending his subordinate*) : Dr. Smith is quite right in pointing out the difficulties.

FLORENCE : But surely wrong in lying down to them.

PALMERSTON : Entirely wrong. . . . The situation, Miss Nightingale, is this. Let us be perfectly frank. The war has been muddled. England for some reason always muddles at the beginning of a war. It's no good looking for scapegoats. The thing to do is to set matters straight. There are many problems ; but Herbert and I have decided that the most important thing to do is to check the appalling wastage in the Army. It means a good deal more than mere nursing. It means vesting the whole medical and commissariat system with a fresh vigorous mind already experienced in hospital management. Herbert wants you, and I agree ; and what we say will go in the Cabinet. . . . (*roundly*) Will you do it ?

FLORENCE : You're sure, both of you, that you wish me to do this—whatever I may discover, whatever I may advocate, whatever I may demand. And I am to have complete control of the nurses ?

SMITH (*uneasily*) : Oh—er—I presume it will be mainly an advisory position. Of course the existing control of the Senior Medical Directors——

PALMERSTON (*impatiently*) : Dr. Smith, you're wasting time.

FLORENCE : But this is crucial. Who is to be in charge ? What is my position ?

HERBERT : You will be responsible to the Secretary of State and you will communicate direct with him. But of course Lord Raglan is Commander-in-Chief and you must work in co-operation with his medical officers.

FLORENCE : Naturally. But the nurses ?

PALMERSTON : Completely under your control. . . . And now may we have our answer ?

[*The door is opened without knocking.* MRS. NIGHTINGALE *and* ELIZABETH *return.*

MRS. N. : Oh, I beg your pardon. . . . My dear Lord Palmerston—— How nice to see you. And Mr. Herbert. Dear me.

HERBERT (*presenting* DR. SMITH) : Dr. Smith. Mrs. Nightingale. . . . Of course you know my wife.

FLORENCE : . . . Perhaps you ought to ask my mother, Lord Palmerston.

MRS. N. (*indifferently*) : What's this, Flo ? Is it a party ?

FLORENCE (*grimly*) : I suppose it might be called a party.

MRS. N. (*puzzled*) : Well . . . it's very dutiful of you, dear. But I think you're old enough to decide a little matter like that for yourself.

PALMERSTON : Herbert, you'd better explain.

HERBERT : Mrs. Nightingale, the Government wants Florence to go to the Crimea and take charge of the hospitals.

MRS. N. : To go to the war. Florence. The Government.

PALMERSTON : Yes. The Cabinet. We're here officially.

MRS. N. : But . . . can she do it ?

HERBERT : There is no one else in the world who can.

ELIZABETH (*echoing under her breath*) : No one else in the world . . .

[*A little pause.*

MRS. N. (*to her daughter—quite incoherent*) : My dear, I'm afraid you're right. I did mean geese after all. . . . We've been so very, very foolish about you, and I'm so proud, my dear, that I don't know how to thank God . . .

[*The old lady can't manage any more.*

FLORENCE (*running to her*) : Mother—darling . . .

[*A little pause.*

(*Simply*) Gentlemen . . . I will do what you want.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE IV

SCENE : *A small room on the ground floor of the Sister's Tower, Barrack Hospital, Scutari.*

A winter afternoon, raw and dismal.

SELINA BRACEBRIDGE *is at work with her staff accounts at a small table.* CORPORAL JONES (*hospital orderly corporal*) *is feverishly unpacking and sorting woollen clothing from a great parcel.*

It is a busy day. Two hospital ships have been discharging wounded since early morning. The heavy curtains separating the room from the main kitchen behind it are wrenched aside from time to time to give admittance to those who have business with the Lady-in-Chief.

A harassed ARMY SURGEON *hurries in. He pauses*

on the threshold on seeing that MISS NIGHTINGALE *is absent.*

SURGEON : Oh . . . where's the Lady-in-Chief, Mrs. Bracebridge ?

SELINA (*grimly*) : Gone down to the purveyor's stores to try and squeeze a few blankets out of him for this rush of wounded to-day.

SURGEON : It's really scandalous. I can't get the simplest medical requisites. They seem to think in England that all you need in a military hospital are packets of Epsom salts. . . .

CORPORAL (*at his counting*) : . . . an' five's forty-eight . . . an' two's fifty. (*He pauses to tie them in a bundle, adding cheerfully as he does*) See you're *noo* to all this, sir, beggin' your pardon. You only bin out a munf.

SURGEON (*sharply*) : New to it ? I am ! But it doesn't take a month to detect inefficiency.

CORPORAL (*under his breath, resuming his work*) : Inefficiency. Civilians in uniform ! Wot's a civilian know about the Army ?

SURGEON : . . . What's that ?

CORPORAL : Nuthin', sir, nuthin' ! I was only sayin' that naturally civilians see things from another point of view like. You are a civilian, sir, ain't you, beggin' your pardon ?

SURGEON : I don't want any impudence from you !

CORPORAL (*meekly*) : No, sir.

SURGEON (*to* MRS. BRACEBRIDGE) : We've run out of bandages again. There's no lint—practically no antiseptics. None of the new patients have any kit at all. They were made to dump their

kit in Bulgaria, if you please. They've no spoons and forks, no shirts, no socks—nothing but the things they're wearing. Almost every other case has got gangrene. They've all got dysentery. The thing's chaos. . . . (*To the* ORDERLY) Hullo —shirts ! I want those.

CORPORAL (*aggrieved*) : Steady on, sir, steady on, please. The numbers on the packages is all wrong. I got to check them through first. . . . (*To* MRS. BRACEBRIDGE) 'Ere's another one short, Mrs. Bracebridge. That's the fourth.

SURGEON : Never mind about that. How many have you counted ?

CORPORAL : One-eight-seven. Ought to 'ave been two 'undred.

SURGEON (*to* MRS. BRACEBRIDGE) : Let me have fifty of those for " B " Ward.

SELINA : Just make out a receipt and certify that you can't get them out of Ordnance store.

SURGEON (*as he writes*) : Out of store ? As if anyone ever got anything out of the Ordnance. I believe that wretched purveyor sends all his supplies secretly back to England to curry favour with the Treasury. . . . I'll send an orderly in to collect these shirts. Where did they come from ?

SELINA : We buy them in Pera. An old villain of a Turk who always delivers short. That's why we check them.

SURGEON (*hungrily*) : You haven't got any dressings, I suppose ? These wounds are in a fearful state.

SELINA (*going to a cupboard*) : I'll see. (*She produces some packages in blue paper.*)

SURGEON (*ecstatic*) : Carbolised lint, by all that's Æsculapian ! Really Miss Nightingale is a

genius. She ought to have a public monument. I mean it seriously.

SELINA : The Surgeon-General doesn't think so.

SURGEON : The Surgeon-General is a buffoon. He doesn't have to work. He only writes tendencious reports and devises preposterous forms to be filled in by over-driven doctors. Medicine played as a parlour game. Bah !

[*He hurries away with his treasures.*

CORPORAL (*counting aloud*) : Four—seven—ten . . . an' five's fifteen—seventeen—eighteen—nineteen—— 'Ullo ! These isn't flannel shirts. These is cotton.

SELINA : Well—make a note of it.

CORPORAL (*as he does so*) : Blowed if I know which is worse ; the purveyor 'oo pretends 'e ain't never got nothing you want and then finds 'e 'as w'en it's too late—or this 'ere old Abdul in the Turkish bazaar 'oo pretends 'e's got everything whether 'e 'as it or not, and when you've paid for it just sends along anythink 'e 'appens to put 'is 'ands on.

[*The curtains are parted, admitting a flushed, agitated staff nurse.*

SELINA : Yes, Mrs. Williams !

MRS. WILLIAMS : Two hundred and seventy extra diets of arrowroot ordered. Where's it to come from ?

SELINA : Have you requisitioned ?

MRS. W. : Here's the reply (*handing a printed form with a note scribbled across it*). " Regret no arrowroot available." From the purveyor.

CORPORAL : That's because the medical stores is hall packed under the shells and cartridges in these 'ere transports. Anybody'd think the War Orfice himagined as you cured a man's

wounds with gunpowder poultices an' loaded the guns with port wine and preserved eggs.

SELINA (*warmly*) : It's nothing to joke about.

CORPORAL : Bless my soul, mum—if you takes the British War Orfice serious you'll precious soon die of a broken 'eart an' a sick 'eadache, you will.

SELINA : They're doing everything they can. Mr. Herbert told us so himself before we left. He promised in the name of the Government.

CORPORAL : Yes, mum. That's where you goes wrong, see ? 'Oo's Mister 'Erbert to the sergeant wot 'as the issuing of the stores ? All 'e cares about is the purveyor an' the military orficer. All they care about is the Treasury and the War Orfice. See, mum, you ladies is *noo* to all this. It takes a man wot's been all 'is life in the Army to understand wotter-meanter-say the 'Igher Arky of the Army so-ter-speak. See, in the War Orfice you're permanent an' in the Governmint you comes and goes. Well, them as is permanent natural enough 'olds together with them as is permanent—an' o' course if one of them is persuaded by a civilian like this 'ere Mr. 'Erbert into sayin' somethin' wot the War Orfice don't strictly approve of like, why it's up to the next man ter get 'im out of it in the way of hinterpretation so-ter-speak.

SELINA : Well, that doesn't help us to get the arrowroot. . . . We've got a little in the store cupboard, but Miss Nightingale wants that kept as a reserve for the very serious cases. What about eggs, Mrs. Williams ? I can manage some eggs.

MRS. W. : You see, there's so many that can't keep the eggs down.

SELINA : Oh, dear. . . . Corporal Jones, don't

you think it's possible that wretched purveyor has got some arrowroot somewhere about in his stores? He doesn't know himself what he's got. I found ninety pounds of chloride of lime only the other day—and he'd just sworn there wasn't a pinch in the place.

CORPORAL: Well, mum, I 'appen to know there is arrowroot in the stores, an' there's a 'ole lot more down in the Turkish customs 'ouse. But you see the purveyor can't unpack wot's in 'is stores, until 'e's 'ad a Board ter sit on it—becos 'e's responsible for the value if he does. An' there won't be a board sittin' till next week. An' as for the stuff in the Turkish customs 'ouse, well that might as well be at the bottom of the ocean becos nothing comes out of there an' never will.

SELINA: Oh dear, oh dear! Aren't men like children? Does anyone realise there's a war on? I'll try to get something for you.

MRS. W.: All right. But what about——

[*Their colloquy is interrupted by voices approaching along the corridor.*

FLORENCE (*outside*): No, no. We'll settle it now, please. (*She appears in the doorway.*) Come in, Mr. Bamford.

[BAMFORD, *the purveyor to the Forces at Scutari, is a harassed fat elderly man with an air of grievance.*

He follows reluctantly.

Sit down. . . . Selina, I want the stock accounts showing what I've supplied to the hospital.

SELINA (*bringing books from the cupboard*): Here they are.

BAMFORD (*trying to bluster*): But this is nothing to do with me, Miss Nightingale. If you choose to expend private funds instead of coming to

my store you can't expect a refund from the Treasury.

FLORENCE (*quelling him with her eye*) : When I suggest a refund it will be time enough for you to talk about it. And as for your store—do you know how much I've had from your store since I came here ? Nothing ! No, wait. We had two hundred hospital gowns last month. Do you know how much I've applied for ? Look at that list. " Not in store." " Not in store." " Not in store." Those are your clerk's initials, aren't they ?

BAMFORD (*sulkily*) : . . . Well ?

FLORENCE : Do you know how many articles were washed in this hospital in the month before my arrival ? . . . Six ! That's your business, isn't it ?

BAMFORD (*muttering*) : The contractor let me down.

FLORENCE : Then you didn't supervise him. I'm using the same contractor.

BAMFORD (*on his dignity*) : I've other things to do besides watching washerwomen do their work.

FLORENCE : Pity you don't do some of them. You're supposed to purvey this hospital. Do you know how much I've supplied myself out of my private funds ? Eleven thousand shirts. Over seven thousand knives, forks and spoons. A couple of thousand Turkish dressing-gowns. Look at this full account. Look at the list of medical comforts. . . . Now look at this. Here's your own return dated January 1st, that's two months ago, obtained by me before I sent out and brought the things myself for distribution to the patients. Tin plates—none. Candlesticks, none. Drinking-cups, none. Knives, forks and

spoons, none. Bolsters, none. Slippers, none. Flannel shirts, none, Socks, pairs, none. . . . Night-caps—a few. For the old women in trousers, I suppose !

BAMFORD (*whining*) : You don't make allowances for our position. You forget we had a ship sunk in the hurricane.

FLORENCE : I've heard of nothing but that wretched ship as an excuse for mismanagement ever since I came out. One might really think that the entire resources of Great Britain went down with her. The *Prince* was sunk on the fourteenth of November. That gave you six weeks to replace the supplies. Or you could have done it locally.

BAMFORD : I can't get these things locally.

FLORENCE : My good sir, if I can you can.

BAMFORD (*grumbling*) : They're not the regulation pattern.

FLORENCE : I see. The patients are to tear their food with their fingers and drink out of their hats until you can obtain the regulation issue.

BAMFORD (*pouncing on her words*) : Ah—but in any case they can't have new mess utensils ! They've got their necessaries in their kit. They're supposed to bring those into hospital when they come.

FLORENCE : But you know as well as I do that the kits were all dumped in Bulgaria, before the Army moved to the Crimea.

BAMFORD : Then they must get this replacement regimentally.

FLORENCE : But how can they when they're a thousand miles away from their battalions ?

BAMFORD (*firmly*) : I can't make a second issue. It's against the War Office warrant.

FLORENCE : Mr. Bamford, you'll live to be ashamed of your attitude to this question.

BAMFORD : Ashamed ? What's there to be ashamed of ? I'm only doing my duty. All the other purveyors administer their departments just as I do.

FLORENCE : Then can anyone wonder that the British Army in the Crimea is wasting away before the eyes of its Commander ? Everywhere the story is the same. Stupidity, incompetence, disease and filth. Those are the enemies of England ! Not the Russians !

BAMFORD : Oh, come, Miss Nightingale. Not filth !

FLORENCE : Filth, Mr. Bamford. When I got here four months ago there wasn't a broom in the place or a scrubbing-brush or a cake of soap. . . . Now you know that's true ; because the first thing I signed when I arrived was a requisition for buckets, scrubbing-brushes and soap, and you couldn't or wouldn't supply them.

BAMFORD : Not wouldn't, Miss Nightingale.

FLORENCE : Yes, wouldn't. I saw buckets and soap in your store before I sent to the bazaar and bought them.

BAMFORD : Yes, but, Miss Nightingale, those hadn't been passed by a Board of Survey. You know as well as I do what the regulations are. You know Government stores have got to be kept intact until a Board can sit.

FLORENCE : Even if people are dying of infection.

BAMFORD : Well, it's the regulation, you see.

FLORENCE : What do you honestly think of such rules—that condemn sick people to death ?

BAMFORD (*cautiously*) : It's not for me to criticise the War Office regulations.

FLORENCE : No, but it is for you to interpret them with common sense. . . . Yesterday Dr. Ames requisitioned for extra fuel. His ward is very exposed. You refused and I had to supply it. Yet you've plenty of fuel.

BAMFORD : Dr. Ames's ward had the regulation allowance.

FLORENCE : But, man, the place was like an ice-house. It's barely weatherproof ! The patients would have died.

BAMFORD (*condescendingly*) : You see, you can't increase the fuel ration except by order of the Board. I know it must be very difficult for a lady who is accustomed to ordering what she pleases to realise the necessity for conforming to regulations. But when you're in the Army you've got to understand——

FLORENCE : Don't talk nonsense. I have the strictest regulations for my nurses. But they're drawn and administered with the idea of promoting efficiency and saving life, not putting a premium on stupidity and death ! The Army is only a matter of common sense.

BAMFORD (*stiffly*) : I beg your pardon, madam, the Army is nothing of the kind. The Army's a matter of strict unquestioning obedience.

FLORENCE : I'm glad you realise there's a difference between the two. In an army run on your lines it would be more praiseworthy to lose a battle by rule of thumb than to win one by originality.

BAMFORD (*stubborn*) : I've got my orders. That's all I know.

FLORENCE : Now, Mr. Bamford, please be reasonable. I've shown you from these accounts how largely we have been self-supporting here. You

must help us sometimes. Two ships are discharging wounded at this moment. I must have hospital gowns and blankets for them.

BAMFORD : You can't, madam. I'm sorry. . . . (*Pertly*) Why not continue to be self-supporting ?

FLORENCE (*disregarding the sneer*) : There are bales of them in your store.

BAMFORD (*wringing his hands*) : But I tell you those haven't been passed, madam. There's no Board till next week.

FLORENCE (*patiently*) : I see your difficulty, and though I think it's ridiculous of you I wouldn' come to you if I could get supplies from civilian sources. But I can't. I've tried.

BAMFORD (*with barely concealed satisfaction*) : That's a great pity. So the despised purveyor is some use after all. . . . They'll have to make shift with what they've got, I'm afraid.

FLORENCE : No, Mr. Bamford, they will not have to make shift. I ask you to supply these things. They're absolutely necessary.

BAMFORD : I'm sorry, I can't.

FLORENCE : Think again.

BAMFORD : I say I can't.

FLORENCE : I *order* you to supply these articles.

BAMFORD (*sulks*) : I'm not responsible to you, or the Army. I'm an official of the Treasury. You know the regulations. Change the regulations and I'll be glad to oblige.

FLORENCE : I'm not going to change the regulations, Mr. Bamford. I'm going to change the purveyor.

BAMFORD (*with a short contemptuous laugh*) : I'd like to see you.

FLORENCE : You shall.

BAMFORD (*uneasily*) : You've no ground of complaint. I'm only doing my duty.

FLORENCE : Unless I receive this requisition in full within an hour I shall inform the Government that I cannot continue to hold my post if you remain in yours.

BAMFORD (*grumbling*) : But Mr. Herbert knows my position. And what can Mr. Herbert do now ? He's not in the Government.

FLORENCE : I shall not write to Mr. Herbert at all. I shall telegraph to Lord Palmerston.

BAMFORD (*pale*) : You can't do that . . .

FLORENCE : Can't I ? You'll see.

BAMFORD (*fluttering*) : But madam . . . I'm a married man. Think of my wife. I'm only doing my duty.

FLORENCE : Quite so, Mr. Bamford. And I'm doing mine. A duty to men in agony. Married men some of them, Mr. Bamford. Think of their wives.

BAMFORD (*protesting*) : You're asking me to risk dismissal.

FLORENCE : I'm asking you to save yourself from dismissal—and public ignominy. And I'm giving you an hour to do it in.

BAMFORD : . . . It's such a large requisition ! (*Reluctantly*) I suppose a hundred wouldn't do ? A hundred of each I mean ? I expect I could manage a hundred without the Board noticing.

FLORENCE : I want the number on that requisition—five hundred and ninety. No more, no less. And I want them in an hour.

[*A little pause.*

BAMFORD (*sulkily*) : Well, you'd better send someone with me to take delivery.

FLORENCE : Yes . . . Corporal Jones, you go.

[*Sharply, as he hesitates.*

and don't waste time !

CORPORAL (*taken aback*) : No, madam. Certainly not, mum.

[*He springs to attention and hurries out after the purveyor.*

SELINA : Well done. . . . We want more arrowroot for extra diets.

FLORENCE : Port wine ? Have you enough of that ?

SELINA : Yes. . . . Corporal Jones says there's arrowroot in the purveyor's store. Not Boarded yet.

FLORENCE : We can buy that in Pera. Mustn't defy regulations unless there's no other way.

SELINA (*at the curtain*) : Mrs. Williams.

[MRS. WILLIAMS *appears.*

Mrs. Williams, you can draw two hundred and seventy arrowroot diets.

MRS. W. : Very good.

FLORENCE : The Sanitary Commissioners ought to be here this afternoon. . . . Selina, have you got a list of the nursing duties ?

SELINA : Of course.

FLORENCE : One of them does duty in four wards.

SELINA : Yes. Nurse Bates.

FLORENCE : Is she the only one ?

SELINA : Yes.

FLORENCE : Send for her !

SELINA (*through the curtains*) : Orderly . . . ask

Nurse Bates—" G " Ward—to come here. (*To* FLORENCE) What is it ?

FLORENCE : If we're going to do any good in this war—and especially if we're going to make a permanent place for women as fellow-workers with men, we must discipline ourselves like men.

SELINA : Surely. Well ?

FLORENCE : Cumming, the Inspector-General, has given me this newspaper cutting. You know how much he likes us ! It's one up to him.

[*As* SELINA *reads*.

Flagrant sensational falsehood, describing the patients dying of neglect and maltreatment. It's unfair and untrue. With what they possess the doctors do wonders.

SELINA : But these shortages of stores and equipment . . .

FLORENCE : That's not the fault of the doctors. And in any case it's my business to deal with that. The nurse must go.

SELINA : But . . . Florence. She obviously meant to be helpful.

FLORENCE : And all she does is to play into the hands of our opponents. Cumming can show that the whole thing is hysterical nonsense. It damages us, Selina. Irreparably. . . . We must have such a reputation for unexaggerated accuracy that when we come forward with the truth about the *real* culprits—the red-tape-fettered officials, the Treasury skinflints, the ignorance of elementary sanitation, the criminal negligence of those whose duty it was to prepare, they'll be unable to reply to a single charge. Facts. Facts. Facts. That's how battles for reform are won . . .

[*Three men have entered : a tall stern man in uniform ; the purveyor,* BAMFORD, *and an angular Scotsman,* MR. MACDONALD *of The Times. The leader stalks up to* MISS NIGHTINGALE'S *table. This is* DR. CUMMING, *the Inspector-General.*

CUMMING : I understand, Miss Nightingale, that you've ordered the purveyor to open a consignment of stores without a board ?

FLORENCE : Yes. They're needed in this hospital.

CUMMING : I dissociate myself entirely from you. Both as a member of the Board and as Inspector-General of Hospitals. I protest against your action, and I shall of course corroborate the purveyor in his report. His attitude is strictly correct.

BAMFORD : I warned you, madam, didn't I ?

MACDONALD : And I shall inform the public through the medium of *The Times* that Miss Nightingale was perfectly right.

CUMMING (*snarling*) : What you say in *The Times*, Mr. Macdonald, does not intimidate me in the smallest degree—either as an administrator or as a medical man.

FLORENCE : Gentlemen, please. It's not necessary to shout in my presence.

CUMMING : I wish you to understand that you're exceeding your powers, Miss Nightingale. You are in charge of the female nursing establishment and you've taken on yourself to supplant the purveyor. I shall report it.

FLORENCE : You must do whatever your conscience tells you to be right, Dr. Cumming. But before you send that report let me advise you to consult the medical officers under you. You will find that the enormous bulk of their stores and supplies to date would never have been obtained at all if I hadn't supplanted the

purveyor. They have been provided from my resources, supplemented by *The Times*' fund of Mr. Macdonald.

MACDONALD : This matter is becoming serious. I've been on the brink of publication more than once and I have been restrained by Miss Nightingale. I'm not going to be restrained any longer. The interests of the sick and wounded are being entirely sacrificed to departmental whitewash. I never heard of anything so scandalous as this shortage of blankets.

CUMMING : Yes, but Miss Nightingale has no business to be issuing all these things. . . . I know you mean well, Miss Nightingale, but this is the purveyor's province—not yours.

FLORENCE : So you think it's better for the wounded to die in accordance with regulation rather than be kept alive by proper attention.

CUMMING (*impatiently interrupting*) : No, no——

FLORENCE : . . . Or perhaps you think : according to regulation they oughtn't to die. Therefore they can't be dead.

CUMMING (*savagely*) : No, I don't think anything of the sort. That's the whole vice of introducing women into the public service. They drag in a long string of irrelevant repartees whenever you try to get them to understand how the system works. What I must beg you to understand——

FLORENCE : I'm not going to argue any more. My job which I was sent out here to do is to care for the sick and wounded. That doesn't only mean smoothing their pillows and giving them medicine. It means ensuring that there is a proper supply of necessaries and comforts. I'm going to see that job done efficiently or know the reason why . . . (*Turning on* BAMFORD) Have those blankets been delivered, Mr. Bamford ?

BAMFORD (*trying to be self-confident*) : No, madam.

FLORENCE : Then in fifteen minutes I send this telegram to Lord Palmerston. (*Showing it.*) And I return to England ; and I publish my experiences out here. And if one single head of a department remains in his post it won't be my fault.

MACDONALD : So far as in me lies I shall see that Miss Nightingale is fully supported by *The Times* newspaper.

CUMMING (*loftily*) : Attacks in the Press are nothing to public men, Mr. Macdonald. So please don't imagine that any fear of what you may say affects the matter one way or the other. We are accustomed to misrepresentation. . . . But of course, Mr. Bamford—er—one wants to show consideration for a lady—er——

FLORENCE : Don't hide behind my skirts and make a favour of it. I say it must be done. And you know what I shall do if it is not done.

BAMFORD : You needn't be harsh about it, madam. As a matter of fact the things are on the way.

FLORENCE : You'd better go and hurry them up.

[*The wretched purveyor looks at* CUMMING *in despair. Then shrugs his shoulders and goes out.*

Dr. Cumming, surely you must see that the necessity of the hospital justifies a breach of regulation.

CUMMING (*growling*) : Yes—well—don't let it happen again.

FLORENCE (*facing him*) : Oh, but it will happen again, Dr. Cumming. Constantly. Wars have a way of upsetting regulations, you know.

[CUMMING, *outfaced, shrugs his shoulders and turns aside.*

. . . Mr. Macdonald, I particularly beg you not to say anything about this in your paper. The Government are really trying to get things done. The Sanitary Commissioners are here. One of them is coming to see me this afternoon. It would be most unfair to attack the Government when they are trying to improve things.

[SELINA BRACEBRIDGE *approaches*.

SELINA : Excuse me. Dr. Sutherland has arrived. He's in the waiting-room.

FLORENCE : That's the Chairman of the Commission. Please stay here both of you and meet him. . . . Bring him in, Selina.

CUMMING : . . . Well, I suppose we've got to make allowance for women. I'd make a report if you were a man, you know.

FLORENCE : Some day, Doctor Cumming, men will learn to judge women by their work, not their sex.

SELINA : Dr. Sutherland.

[*He enters. A dry Aberdonian Scot of about forty-eight.*

SUTHERLAND : Miss Nightingale ?

FLORENCE : Yes.

SUTHERLAND : I'm the Chairman of yon Sanitary Commission. Doctor Gavin is with me and Mr. Rawlinson. . . . I'm thenking tae judge by the aroma about this edifice that we've not arrived any too soon.

FLORENCE : Mr. Macdonald of *The Times* . . . Dr. Cumming, the Inspector-General of Hospitals for Scutari.

SUTHERLAND (*to* CUMMING) : We' ye not at Edinburgh in thirty-two ? I thocht I minded ye. Man, it's guid tae see a brither Scot. . . . Mps ! This place is sairtinly not remarkable for

salubriousness. Whatever ga'ed ye take it for a hospital, Dr. Cumming? As a mortuary I cud understand. It's a fair pest-house!

CUMMING (*shortly*): It was this place or no place.

SUTHERLAND: Well, ye'd hae been better wi' no place—for then ye'd hae had tae run up marquees and huts just. And they're no bad.... Ye seen the plans of this building?

CUMMING: I can't say I have.

SUTHERLAND: Ah, ye should always take a keek at the architect's plans. Now this place from what I can judge by the plans is no that well equipped with the appliances of modern sanitation. Man, I'm thenking ye'll hae to rebuild your whole drainage system!

CUMMING: Where do you imagine we're going to get the labour from?

SUTHERLAND (*softly*): I doan't know. I'm no verra carin', ma mannie. But ye'll likely hae tae dae it!

CUMMING: Have to? Who says so?

SUTHERLAND: I says so. I've plenary powers... plenary powers from yon Lord Palmerston ye ken.

FLORENCE: Then will you please go at once through all the wards? I'll send a sister with you, because I don't want to tell you my opinions till you've formed yours . . . or take Dr. Cumming if you like.

SUTHERLAND (*approvingly*): Ye don't waste much time, Miss Nightingale. Aye, I might do that.... Would you have the leisure tae accompany me, Dr. Cumming?

CUMMING (*shortly*): I'll come if you wish. It's

preposterous to talk of rebuilding. The building is perfectly all right as it is.

SUTHERLAND (*composedly*) : Well, it's mysel' has tae judge that. I'll just take a look and see.

SELINA (*to* FLORENCE) : That nurse you sent for, she's here.

FLORENCE : Yes. . . .

[*The* NURSE *is brought in, and stands wretchedly in the background.* FLORENCE *continues addressing* SUTHERLAND.

Will you come back here and tell me your opinion before you go? . . . Where are you quartered?

SUTHERLAND : Aye. I'll come back and tell you. . . . I'm no' verra sure where we'd be living. Some fine hotel in Constantinople, I'm thenkin'. But it'll no dae. I'm comin' tae live over here tae oversee the works.

FLORENCE : Then I'll expect you back in half an hour or so.

[SUTHERLAND *and* CUMMING *depart.*

(*Addressing* MACDONALD) Mr. Macdonald, have you time to do something for us to-night?

MACDONALD : Yes.

FLORENCE : Our stock of arrowroot is very low and the purveyor can't supply any at present. Will you go and buy up all you can in the bazaar.

MACDONALD : Yes. Anything else?

FLORENCE : Selina?

SELINA : More shirts. Candles. Soap. Needles and thread.

MACDONALD (*who has jotted them down*) : Yes.

FLORENCE : See if you can get any more slippers. Warm ones. Plenty. A thousand pairs if you can.

MACDONALD : Yes. . . . Is that all ?

[*He hurries away.*

Almost before he is out of the room FLORENCE *has turned to the next business.*

FLORENCE : Now, Nurse Bates.

NURSE BATES : You sent for me, ma'am ?

FLORENCE : Yes. Sit down. You know our rules, don't you ?

NURSE B. : (*brightly*) : Oh yes, of course, ma'am.

FLORENCE : You know we're all forbidden to communicate with newspapers.

NURSE B. (*uneasily*) : Oh, yes, of course, ma'am.

FLORENCE : Have you written anything that has appeared in the newspapers ?

NURSE B. : Oh, no, ma'am.

FLORENCE : Nothing whatever ?

NURSE B. : Oh, no, ma'am.

FLORENCE : I see. . . . You work in wards A, C, E, and G, don't you ?

NURSE B. : Yes, ma'am.

FLORENCE : Have you ever known anyone die of starvation in this hospital ?

NURSE B. (*cringing*) : No, ma'am.

FLORENCE : Or of neglect or lack of medical attention ?

[*The girl is silent.*

Just look at this. (*She gives the cutting.*) Have you ever seen that letter before? I trust you not to tell me an untruth. . . . Have you seen it before?

NURSE B. (*whispers*) : Yes.

FLORENCE : Did you write it?

NURSE B. : Not to the paper, I swear.

FLORENCE : That isn't the point. You wrote it.

NURSE B. : Yes.

FLORENCE : Did you know it had been used in the paper?

NURSE B. (*faintly*) : Yes.

FLORENCE : Pack your things and be ready to leave to-morrow morning.

NURSE B. : Let me stay, Miss Nightingale. For God's sake let me stay.

FLORENCE : That isn't possible.

NURSE B. : You won't forgive me?

FLORENCE : What has forgiveness to do with it? There's no ill-will in the matter! I'm here to run a hospital. I can't do that with people I don't trust. You prevaricated to me. You'll do it again. It's not your fault—you're made that way.

NURSE B. : I'll never, never tell a lie again as long as I live.

FLORENCE : I hope not.

SELINA : Let her stay, Florence.

FLORENCE (*very gently*) : The boat goes to-morrow morning. You must be ready to go then. . . . That is all.

[*The* NURSE *turns and goes out in dejected silence.*
SELINA (*when they are alone*) : Is that irrevocable ?

FLORENCE : What ? . . . Oh, the nurse. Absolutely irrevocable, Selina. And the others must be told why. Then it won't happen again.

SELINA (*accepting the situation*) : I see . . . Florence. Have you had any food to-day ?

FLORENCE : Breakfast.

SELINA : You had one egg and a piece of bread and butter.

FLORENCE : No time. There's the mail to be written yet.

SELINA (*firmly*) : I'm going to give you some tea and biscuits. And you're going to rest for five minutes. (*Bustling about.*) You'll kill yourself if you go on like this. You haven't had a proper meal since we arrived. All in a scramble.

FLORENCE : Don't lecture me.

SELINA : You'll make yourself ill.

FLORENCE : And don't croak at me. . . . Selina, what about the arrangements for the cholera patients. Hot water for stuping. Extra blankets.

SELINA : I've seen to that. . . . Here's your tea. Drink it like a lamb.

FLORENCE : In a minute.

[CORPORAL JONES *shambles in.*

Yes ?

CORPORAL : Last batch of wounded being carried up from the boats now, madam.

FLORENCE : They're late. It'll be dark before they're all in. . . . Are the nurses standing by in the wards, Selina ?

SELINA : Yes.

FLORENCE (*calling*) : Mrs. Williams !

[MRS. WILLIAMS *looks through the curtains.*

Last batch coming up now. Hot drinks all ready ?

MRS. W. : All ready, ma'am.

CORPORAL : One of the men's bin askin' for you, mum.

FLORENCE : Right. I'll come to the door and watch them brought in.

SELINA : Oh, don't, Florence. You're dead tired.

FLORENCE : Not so tired as they are. Can't disappoint the men, Selina. (*To the* CORPORAL.) I'll be there. When are they likely to arrive ?

CORPORAL : They're coming in the gates now, mum.

FLORENCE (*rising*) : Right.

[*He goes.*

SELINA : Your tea, Florence dear.

FLORENCE : Can't worry about it now. Must see these poor fellows brought in.

SELINA (*following her*) : Well, just a sip, darling.

FLORENCE : Oh well . . . (*She takes it.*) . . . You've put brandy in this, Selina.

SELINA : You need it.

FLORENCE : The brandy is for the sick, not the able. It's too precious to be wasted. . . . (*Giving the cup to* SELINA.) You drink the rest of this yourself. You're tired, too.

SELINA : I'm all right.

FLORENCE (*with quiet firmness that brooks no argument*) : Do as you're told, Selina.

[*She throws the door open. They stand together watching the wounded carried in. The murmur and tramp of the passing bearers is audible.*

SELINA : Poor fellows.

FLORENCE (*shaking her head*) : Large number of amputations, I'm afraid. My God, what a state they're in. All in rags. . . . Make a note about extra clothing, Selina. . . . Cholera too ! Look ! I hope there's plenty of hot water ready.

[CORPORAL JONES *reappears in the doorway.*

CORPORAL : They're bringing up that man now, mum.

FLORENCE (*by door, still looking out*) : Right ! (*To* SELINA.) Frost-bitten every one of them, Selina. . . . It's going to be a nightmare. . . . Stop. . . . No. . . . Is that the man ? (*To* CORPORAL JONES.) Tell the bearers to bring him in here.

CORPORAL (*calling*) : Come along, me lads. This way.

FLORENCE (*in an agony of self-restraint as the stretcher is carried in*) : Bring him over here.

THE MAN ON THE STRETCHER (*faintly*) : Florence . . . Is that you, Florence ?

[*The stretcher-bearers set him down and go.*

It is HENRY TREMAYNE.

FLORENCE : . . . Henry—why did you ?

TREMAYNE (*gasping*) : I thought if you could, I could.

FLORENCE : . . . My dear, they've wounded you.

TREMAYNE : They've done for me. Flo, I only managed to hold out on that ghastly ship to see you for a few minutes before . . . (*Summoning up all his strength*) My God, Florence. Do something to improve those ships. You can't imagine the horror of them . . . and the filth. We're all verminous, caked with blood—filthy. We're all rubbed raw from lying on the deck. I don't mind for myself, it was part of the . . . (*His strength suddenly goes.*) Wounded men oughtn't to suffer that agony.

FLORENCE (*soothing him*) : Yes, yes. I know it's bad. But we're getting it right little by little. I'll take up the ships, dear, I promise. Now you must let me look at your wounds.

TREMAYNE (*faintly*) : Not worth while. That awful journey up from the boats. I'm finished.

FLORENCE : Not yet. (*She lifts the wrappings on his chest. Her face stiffens. She turns.*) Doctor, Selina. Quick ! Get Ames.

[SELINA *hurries out.*

Henry, I won't rebandage you . . . till the doctor comes.

TREMAYNE : You won't ever, Florence. I didn't come here to be patched up. Just to see you, and say good-bye.

FLORENCE : My dear, you mustn't give in.

TREMAYNE : Can't waste strength arguing.

FLORENCE : Nor talking. Be quiet . . . darling.

TREMAYNE : Strength going. Feel it. . . . Do you remember . . . the fountain, Florence ?

FLORENCE : My dear, don't—don't !

TREMAYNE : And the lights in the windows and the sick carried in . . .

FLORENCE : Hush, hush ! Be quiet.

TREMAYNE (*his mind reverting to the game they played*) : May I ask . . . the fountain . . . a question ?

FLORENCE (*tenderly*) : The fountain says ask on —but, oh, my dear, don't tire yourself.

TREMAYNE : Fountain—did she truly love me ?

FLORENCE : The fountain says : She will love you and long for you to the end of her wretched life.

TREMAYNE : Yes ? . . . That's all I wanted . . .

[SELINA *reappears.*

FLORENCE : Is he coming ?

SELINA : I told him.

FLORENCE (*To* TREMAYNE) : The doctor will be here in a minute. (*Taking a card and speaking with a cheerfulness that is all assumed*) I must enter you in the hospital register. What are you, Henry, an officer ?

TREMAYNE (*trying to laugh and checking himself with a little gasp*) : Can't laugh. Hurts too much. How could I be an officer, Flo ? I enlisted. . . . They made me a corporal after Inkerman.

FLORENCE (*entering the particulars*) : What unit ?

TREMAYNE : Rifle Brigade.

FLORENCE (*still writing*) : . . . In your own name, Henry ?

TREMAYNE (*a little defiant*) : Yes. . . . Nothing to be ashamed of, is it ?

FLORENCE : My dear, don't talk like that. (*Bringing the card and tying it to his button*) There. Now you're ticketed and docketed and you'll be in my own special ward.

TREMAYNE (*his voice louder*) : Florence. I'm going to get better, I believe. I feel suddenly much stronger.

FLORENCE : . . . That's right. . . . But not if you talk. (*In an anxious undertone*) I'm afraid this means the end. I hate these sudden rallies. . . . Can't you hurry that doctor ?

SELINA (*also in an undertone*) : . . . But they can't leave cases that might be saved for dying men —dear. Can they ?

FLORENCE : That new man, Sutherland. He's in the hospital—and he's got nothing special to do. Find him, Selina, for God's sake.

[SELINA *hurries out once more.*

TREMAYNE : Very dark . . .

FLORENCE (*kindling a lamp*) : Very dark, my dear. But we'll soon have a light for you.

TREMAYNE : . . . Yes. Light . . . (*Association of ideas*) Lighten our darkness we beseech Thee, O Lord . . .

FLORENCE : . . . and by Thy great mercy defend him from all perils and dangers of this night. (*To herself*) This is my doing. . . . I sent him to death.

TREMAYNE (*his mind beginning to wander*) : Stand to your front . . . Party ! As you were. Stand at ease. . . . Trenches again. . . . That's right. Up there by the Three Mortar Battery. (*Hectoring*) Am I in charge of this party or are you ? . . . Mud . . . and blood. . . . You're right, sergeant! Remember how they squealed when we got among them with the bayonet ? (*Shouting*) Shove it into them ! (*Suddenly quiet*) Poor devils ! What's that ? Well, I suppose they're men too, aren't they ? Oh, yes you would. Grumble . . . snarl . . .

FLORENCE (*soothing him*) : Quiet, my dear, quiet. (*Spooning some liquid into his mouth*) Try to rest till the doctor comes.

TREMAYNE (*inarticulately*) : Wha's 'ma'a . . . marrar. . . . (*His eyes close.*)

FLORENCE (*trying to communicate her strength to him and at the same time reassure herself*) : That's all finished now. No more horror for you, my dear. You've got to build up your strength again. When you're well, Henry darling, and it's all over, I'll come and look after you. (*Crooning to him*) I'll do anything, my dear, if you'll only stay alive and not die and leave me alone. You must will yourself to live, Henry. We'll go far into the country and never leave each other again. I'll make myself your slave for what you've gone through for me. . . . Oh, God—don't take him away . . .

[*A little pause. He suddenly opens his eyes.*

TREMAYNE (*in an odd far-away voice*) : Florence, is that you ? Where am I ?

FLORENCE : All right. You're with me.

TREMAYNE (*clinging to her hand*) : It's darker and darker. . . .

FLORENCE : Do you want . . . the chaplain ?

TREMAYNE : No—I'm all right. . . . God bless you, Flo. (*A sudden rush of blood to his lips.*) . . . Water. I'm choking!

[*She snatches a glass from the table, fills it from the water-pitcher. But before she has brought it his head has fallen sideways. She stands petrified at the sight.*

FLORENCE (*agonised*) : . . . Henry . . . speak to me, for God's sake . . . (*Mastering herself.*) My work. I've got to do my work. We've all got to die. . . . It's only a change of tissues. You can't destroy the soul. . . . Oh, my dear, my dear . . .

[*The door is abruptly opened by* DR. SUTHERLAND.

SUTHERLAND : D'ye want me ? I got a message.

FLORENCE : . . . Too late. He's dead.

SUTHERLAND (*by the body*) : Aye ! He is that. (*Looking under the wrappings.*) My powers ! Can ye wonder ? (*Touched by her stricken face.*) Was he a friend of yours, maybe ?

[*She nods, speechless.*

It's the lot of the sons of women. You're too grand a woman yourself tae let this prey on you.

[*She is silent.*

You'll think of the others—over yonder in the wards.

[*She nods again—mechanically.*

CORPORAL JONES *hurries in.*

CORPORAL : Miss Nightingale. Immediate amputation. Dr. Ames says will you come and help him ?

FLORENCE : . . . I'll come.

[*He goes back.*

SUTHERLAND (*softly*) : That's a braw lassie.

[*She takes up her lamp and moves slowly to the door.*

FLORENCE (*turning in the doorway*) : Good-bye . . . my love . . .

[*She goes out bravely.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

END OF ACT II

ACT III

SCENE V

A room in Old Burlington Street.

Nearly seven years have passed since FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE *embarked with her nurses for the Crimea; more than six years since the death of* HENRY TREMAYNE; *and five since the conclusion of the campaign. Years of unceasing labour. Hardening years.*

FLORENCE *at forty-one is in the prime of her mental capacity and energy. The rigours of the war have left her so enfeebled in health that at times her life seems to be despaired of. She nearly died during a visit to the Balaclava hospitals and trenches in 1855. Since her return she has passed through crisis after crisis of physical collapse. But she has come back from the war dedicated to one purpose—that the horrors of those years shall never be re-enacted. While life remains in her body her experience and her energies shall be solely devoted to ensuring, so far as human fallibility allows, that the Armies of Britain when next they take the field shall be spared the miseries and ineptitudes of Scutari.*

FLORENCE *at forty-one, in the prime of her mental powers, bears little resemblance to the eager girl of the fountain or the anguished woman who saw her lover die before her. Habitual disregard of her own ailments has bred in her an impatient contempt for the illnesses of others—if those illnesses happen to interfere with "the work." Seven years' rigid repression of sex (it was somewhere about this time that she refused to have anything to do with the Lock Hospital because she entirely disapproved of the principle of such a place) have clamped her features into an ascetic mask, fixed the lines of her mouth in*

a hard line, and soured her sense of humour into an acid irony.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE *at forty-one is probably the most commanding personality in England. Cabinet Ministers do her bidding. Royalty openly declares, "I wish we had her at the War Office."* LORD PALMERSTON *himself, Prime Minister for the second time at seventy-seven, the idol of the country and the most independent man of his day, is the ally of* MISS NIGHTINGALE, *readily accessible to her and quite prepared to endow her plans with the impress of his authority.* LADY PALMERSTON *is less enthusiastic. But wives are seldom sympathetic with the influence of other women on their husbands—however irreproachable in the physical sense. And* LADY PALMERSTON *is not the only woman who looks askance at the Nightingale power.* LADY HERBERT OF LEA *at far closer quarters is watching with an anxiety that is deepening into apprehension the subjection of her husband to the heroine of Scutari.*

SIDNEY HERBERT *is a sick man, so sick that, strongly against his own inclinations, he recently exchanged from the House of Commons to the Lords in order that he might continue Secretary of State for War, and thus please* MISS NIGHTINGALE. *His own wish was to give up office, and remain a private member. His wife's wish was that he should give up all public work and save his life . . . but she managed to write a letter thanking* FLORENCE *for the partial relief of translation to the House of Lords. For the terrible* FLORENCE *might have insisted on his remaining in the Commons and at the War Office as well. . . .*

A fine day in early summer. FLORENCE *having in five years of sustained warfare imposed her will on the Government, is about to safeguard the permanence of her work by a "root and branch" reform of the War Office. Her "Cabinet" of experts is to meet in a few minutes to "brief"* SIDNEY HERBERT *for*

the next move. FLORENCE *is in consultation with* DR. SUTHERLAND, *who since the Crimean War has attached himself to her as technical adviser. They have just finished putting together a great portfolio of papers.*

FLORENCE : Complete ! Unanswerable ! It only remains for Sidney to give it his authority and the thing is done.

SUTHERLAND : Aye. . . .

FLORENCE : What is it, Scotty ? You're not suggesting Sidney Herbert will fail us ?

SUTHERLAND : No' just that. But he's weakenin'. Physically I mean ! A body doesnae go into the Hoose o' Peers at his time o' life wi'out he's got a reason.

FLORENCE : He's gone to the Lords simply in order to see this thing through. Rather than give it up, in fact. In six months——

SUTHERLAND : There's many things can happen in six months !

FLORENCE : Very well. Sufficient unto the day. . . . He meets us this morning. To-morrow—if that isn't looking too far ahead for you—he will say something about our scheme on the Army Appropriation Bill. Give it his blessing. Next week he will come out for the reforms in answer to a pre-arranged question. And in six months' time, Scotty——

[*A* MAID *enters.*

MAID : Lady Herbert of Lea to see you, madam.

FLORENCE : *Lady* Herbert. You mean Lord Herbert, don't you ?

MAID : No, madam. Her ladyship.

FLORENCE : Bring her in, of course.

[*The* MAID *goes.*

What's this, Scotty ? She hasn't been here for months. She thinks I've . . . too much influence. Is she . . . trying to interfere, do you suppose ? (*Grimly*) She'd better not.

SUTHERLAND (*drily*) : I wouldnae trouble your head wi' supposin's. The woman has likely come in friendship. Ye were frien's.

FLORENCE : I wonder. Someone nearly wrecked my whole work in the war by sending out a second contingent of nurses within a fortnight of my arrival. And although they appointed me in sole control, the second batch were sent to report not to me but to Cumming, my principal stumbling-block. I've always wondered if that little slip was inspired by an . . . adversary.

SUTHERLAND (*bluntly*) : I wouldnae trouble your mind wi' such blethers : The man has worked for ye—nearly as hard as I hae mysel'.

FLORENCE : Modest little fellow ! . . . He's all right as long as I have him under my eye. But he's weak, Scotty ! Susceptible to influences. . . . I don't know. I'm not easy.

[*The* MAID *enters.*

MAID : Lady Herbert of Lea, madam.

[ELIZABETH HERBERT *enters. Time has dealt with her more than generously. At thirty-five years of age she is a strikingly lovely woman.*

ELIZABETH (*blending condescension, antagonism, fear, and a touch of insincerity in a gushing embrace*) : Flo, darling . . .

FLORENCE : Well, Elizabeth, how are you ?

ELIZABETH : Rather bored, don't you know—*rather* bored with the season and all that. But very glad to see you . . . dear.

FLORENCE : You know Dr. Sutherland, I think.

ELIZABETH : Oh, yes, Dr. Sutherland, of course. How do you do ? . . . You weren't at Ranelagh yesterday, Flo ? No, of course you don't go to Ranelagh. No. You're so wise not to tax your strength with Society. Of course, in the Cabinet, don't you know, one has to.

FLORENCE : Yes, Elizabeth. . . . Are you on your way to a function now ?

ELIZABETH : Oh, no. Oh dear no. No. I think the season's been too much for us all this year. I'm just off to Spa. You know Spa . . . in Germany.

FLORENCE : I know Spa. Yes.

ELIZABETH : I've persuaded Sidney to—er—to go with me.

FLORENCE : When ?

ELIZABETH : Well—er—in a few days.

FLORENCE : Did he send you to tell me this ?

ELIZABETH : What do you mean . . . Florence ?

[*The swords are now drawn. The rivals stand confronting each other for the duel.*

SUTHERLAND (*awkwardly*) : Guid sakes ! Ah've no finished yon draft for this afternoon. Excuse me. I'll no be long.

[*Before they can speak he is out of the room.*

ELIZABETH : Well—that's better. Now we can talk . . . frankly.

FLORENCE : I always talk frankly. You haven't answered my question.

ELIZABETH : Need I answer questions about my husband ?

FLORENCE : If you bring me information, I am entitled to know its source.

ELIZABETH : Sidney is under doctor's orders.

FLORENCE (*witheringly*) : Doctor's orders !

ELIZABETH : He's resigned from the Cabinet.

FLORENCE (*staggered*) : And he left you to tell me.

ELIZABETH : Florence, you forget I'm his wife.

FLORENCE : When did this happen ? He is due here this morning. Do you see that pile of papers and books ? That's the work we've done to prepare him. He gets all the credit. The reform of the Army is all credited to him. It has all been done anonymously here. Willingly. Gladly. I've read the papers and seen him acclaimed the greatest War Secretary of modern times. And I've been so happy to think that we here could lovingly dedicate ourselves through him to our work and see him reap the honour. We've dreamed of him succeeding old Palmerston at the head of the Government—brought to the highest position in the country by us. Our leader. Our master. One more effort, only one, was needed for complete victory. He could have rested then. (*Bitterly*) And you talk to me of doctor's orders. I've been under doctor's orders for seven years. I've been given up, dead and buried, by doctor's orders. I've been told—even by old Sutherland here—that the work would kill me. But I've stayed at my post. I'm here working—morning, noon, and night. And I'm

a woman. And you tell me the leader we've been proud to serve is giving up within sight of the winning-post like a cowardly schoolboy who hasn't the heart to finish his race !

ELIZABETH : You've no right to say that. He's compelled to give up. It's killing him.

FLORENCE : Suppose it did kill him—or me—or you—or any of us. What does that matter compared with the results ? Isn't it better to die gaining a great cause than to jeopardise it by shirking ignominiously on the plea of sickness ? Don't you know that it's better never to start a thing at all than to begin and then drop it ? Who's going to take up the fight now, when it's so completely identified with Sidney ? You know what men are.

ELIZABETH : I know what women are, and the lengths to which they'll go. What's all this about fighting. What are you fighting for ?

FLORENCE : I'm fighting the battle of the men who died in my arms in the war.

ELIZABETH (*impatiently*) : Oh, the war ! That's all over and done with.

FLORENCE : Till next time.

ELIZABETH : Flo darling . . . don't be a crank ! People aren't interested in the war.

FLORENCE : That's why I'm fighting, Elizabeth ! Everyone's forgotten about it. I haven't. And I shall go on fighting for the trust reposed in me by the dead. That the common soldier, the faithful uncomplaining wounded, be never again put to torture by blundering incompetence and murdered by entrenched officialdom.

ELIZABETH : You think you're fighting for that. But you're not. You're fighting for your own vanity. The vanity that sent Henry Tremayne to death.

FLORENCE : What do you know about Henry Tremayne ?

ELIZABETH : Wasn't he . . . one of the faithful uncomplaining wounded who died in your arms ? . . .

FLORENCE : Did Sidney tell you that ? I might have remembered that nothing is too sacred to be blurted out in wedlock. I forgot about Samson and Delilah.

ELIZABETH : Florence, how dare you ? . . . I beg your pardon. I oughtn't to have said what I did.

FLORENCE (*harshly*) : I don't blame you, Elizabeth. You don't understand life, but it isn't your fault. How can women brought up as we all are be expected to think of anything except the needs and desires of the moment ? But Sidney's desertion. That's a tragedy. . . . Do you realise that in the Army they shoot a man if he runs away from his post in battle ? He can't say, " I'm sorry ; I'm not feeling quite myself today." He's taken out in the cold dawn and shot beside his own grave. And the Secretary of State ratifies the execution.

ELIZABETH : Oh, that's different. You always exaggerate so ! It's absurd to talk like that.

FLORENCE : Is it ? Why ? Because one of them is a half-educated, powerless creature compelled to do what he's told, and the other is a great officer of State responsible to the country ?

ELIZABETH : Florence. It's time someone told

you the truth. You've a lust for power! If things don't go just your way you make a grievance of it. . . . Dear—it isn't reasonable! Let Sidney get his health back, and perhaps later on he'll be able to pick up the threads again.

FLORENCE (*fiercely*): Pick up the threads! How can he ever recover his prestige after running away, sick, from his permanent officials? What a state of affairs! What a commentary on democratic Government! The elected tribune of the people driven to a rest cure by the bureaucracy he's elected to control. Sidney Herbert beaten by Ben Hawes! It's a worse disgrace than the hospitals at Scutari. . . . Can't you see how he's letting everyone down, Elizabeth? Throwing the game away with all the winning cards in his hand. Why can't he just see this thing through and then go, if you like?

ELIZABETH: Because he has resigned. I've told you. He's no longer Secretary of State.

FLORENCE: You persuaded him to do this!

ELIZABETH: Yes.

FLORENCE: With no thought for his work.

ELIZABETH: On the contrary. With the fixed determination that his work should not come before his health. I'm interested in Sidney's career. But I'm far more interested in my husband's life.

FLORENCE: Has Pam accepted his resignation yet?

[*No reply.*

Perhaps it's not too late. . . .

ELIZABETH : . . . Florence, you mustn't interfere now !

FLORENCE : I've always suspected that you were opposed to our working together. Ever since that day at Harley Street when you tried to prevent me from going to the Crimea.

ELIZABETH (*frankly*) : I didn't want you to go to the Crimea. I was afraid. I've always been afraid of you, Florence. Afraid of your . . . intimacy with Sidney.

FLORENCE : . . . What do you mean ?

ELIZABETH : Not that, and you know I don't ! When we first met in Italy I . . . wondered ; but I soon saw there was nothing . . . physical. . . . I almost wish there had been. At least it would be human—and more understandable. And it wouldn't have brought Sidney to his death-bed, like this terrible slave-driving will of yours. . . . Besides, I could have held my own against you and won him back—at that.

FLORENCE (*almost tenderly*) : Liz, dear, I'm really very, very sorry for you. It must be awful to be unable to dissociate men from the seraglio.

ELIZABETH : That's hateful of you.

FLORENCE : I don't mean it to be. I mean I'm honestly sorry. I've never been afraid of death, and I suppose I can't understand other people considering it. If Sidney really is so . . . feeble—which I find it hard to believe . . .

ELIZABETH : You seem to think that in spite of his promise you can still take Sidney away from me for your work. Well—try. Take him.

FLORENCE : Not at all. I haven't any intention

of taking him away. My work is far too valuable to be entrusted to a hypochondriac.

[ELIZABETH *recoils at the word.*

I hope you'll have good weather in Germany —and that when you come back, if Sidney ever goes to the House of Lords he'll put in a word occasionally for the things we believe in. . . . Good-bye.

ELIZABETH : But, Florence dear, you know how proud I am of you, and how I admire you. It's only that I'm fonder of Sidney and can't bear to see him break up. I know how much he owes to you, and how much you've done for him and how utterly disinterested you've been. I wish I could be disinterested too. But I can't. I simply can't.

FLORENCE : No, Liz. You can't. Don't try to.

ELIZABETH : You don't . . . mind ?

FLORENCE (*shrugging*) : What's the use of minding ?

[*A knock at the door.*

Yes ?

[*The* MAID *enters.*

MAID : Lord Herbert of Lea.

FLORENCE : At once.

[*The* MAID *goes out.*

ELIZABETH (*anxious*) : What are you going to do, Florence ?

FLORENCE : Nothing.

[*The door is opened.* HERBERT *enters—plainly a sick man.*

HERBERT : Oh ! (*With forced cheerfulness*) Hello, Liz !

[*He looks inquiringly from one to the other.*

FLORENCE : Well, Sidney, so you're going to Spa. I'm so sorry about your health and I'm sure it is quite the best thing for you to do.

HERBERT : Is that what you think ?

FLORENCE (*quietly*) : That is what I think. . . . Has Lord Palmerston appointed your successor yet ?

HERBERT : How do you know I'm to have a successor . . . ?

ELIZABETH : I told her, Sidney.

FLORENCE : I hoped I should have heard that from you personally. But I didn't ! . . . Who is it to be ?

HERBERT : Sir George Lewis, I believe.

FLORENCE (*ironically*) : Charming ! He writes exquisite Latin epigrams and knows nothing whatever about sanitation. Our work will go famously !

HERBERT : You don't seem to mind much.

FLORENCE : Who am I to mind ? Either much or little ?

ELIZABETH (*hastily*) : Florence is so good about it, Sidney.

HERBERT : I'm a deserter.

ELIZABETH : I'm going to leave you to talk together.

FLORENCE : You needn't, Liz. There's nothing !

ELIZABETH : I'd like to. . . . I know you won't encourage him in any foolishness.

FLORENCE (*with touch of bitterness*) : Is that how our work seems to you, Liz ? Foolishness ?

ELIZABETH : You know I don't mean that. But work of any sort is foolishness to him now. . . . Good-bye, dear. I'll let myself out. I'll come and see you when we get back.

[*She goes. A little pause.*

HERBERT (*gloomily*) : She's right, Florence. Work of any sort is foolishness now. . . . I couldn't do it.

FLORENCE : You don't feel up to it, I suppose ?

HERBERT : It's not that. Lack of capacity. Something has broken. I shall never come back, Florence. Liz doesn't know. Don't tell her.

FLORENCE : What's this, Sidney ?

HERBERT : I shall be dead in a month.

FLORENCE (*kindly but incredulous*) : Is that doctor's orders too ? Cheer up, Sidney. They've said the same to me for years. But I manage to jog along.

HERBERT : I really tried, Florence. But I collapsed this morning. I fainted going upstairs

FLORENCE (*grimly*) : I know. I've done the same.

HERBERT : There's no point in my seeing your people, is there ?

FLORENCE : None whatever . . . we've got to start again.

[*An awkward pause.*

HERBERT : Well, I'd better go, I suppose. Good-bye.

FLORENCE : I've never known a bitterer moment than this in my life. When poor Harry was killed, I thought at least there was my work to live for. Now my work is killed too. . . . I suppose there is some purpose in being born !

HERBERT (*much moved*) : Poor Florence. Our joint work. . . .

FLORENCE : I'm not going to give in. I shall go on alone. Good-bye, Sidney. Please God you'll get your health back again, my dear. Thank you a thousand times for all you've done. God bless you.

HERBERT (*shakily*) : God bless you, Florence.

[*He turns abruptly and goes out. A moment of silence in which she contemplates the wreckage of five years. The click of the door.* DR. SUTHERLAND *puts in a smiling face and rejoins her.*

SUTHERLAND (*slily*) : I just thought I'd make mysel' a wee bit scarce. . . . Is Lord Herbert no comin' for the papers ? (*Smitten by her tragic immobility*) Eh, lassie, what will be the matter ?

FLORENCE : He's given in. We've got to begin all over again.

SUTHERLAND : Dearie, dearie me, is that no provoking ? Ah weel—it's a way life has ! . . .

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE VI

The same room. August 1861.

FLORENCE *and her mother in talk.* MRS. NIGHTINGALE *has mellowed into a delightfully garrulous old lady of 73—still devoted to her "boy" husband, and almost tearfully proud of her great daughter. Her intellect is still good, but old age has blunted the imperious will and softened the asperities of character. There is little or nothing left of the fire of "King-Killing" Smith of Norwich in the white-haired old woman who began life a year before the storming of the Bastille, with the interminable reign of George III not yet half run; who was already a child of six when Danton and Robespierre fell in turn to the guillotine, and can still remember the shouts and bell-ringing for Lord Howe's victory over the French on the "glorious first of June."*

MRS. NIGHTINGALE : . . . and Papa is going over to Lord Palmerston at Broadlands for the shooting. . . . And Harry and Pop are coming down from Claydon to stay with us at Embley in September. And the Shores will be there part of the time. . . . Are you coming down to Embley, too, my love ?

FLORENCE : I hope so, dear. If I can.

MRS. N. : Well now, won't that be nice. . . . And the Sidney Herberts. Perhaps *they* might come over. Have they written lately ?

FLORENCE : Quite a cheerful letter. From Spa. A fortnight ago.

MRS. N. : Well now, isn't *that* nice ? A most delightful man. And his dear little wife too. Elizabeth. Yes. So charming and so attractive. . . . And she has been such a good friend to you, my love. . . . So wrapped up in your

work. So thoughtful of you. Did you know that all those extra nurses they hurried out after you to that dreadful Crimea were entirely her idea ? Just to make things easier for you. Well, now, wasn't that nice of her ?

FLORENCE (*inscrutably*) : . . . Wasn't it ! . . . I never knew for certain before ; but I always . . . suspected it.

MRS. N. (*a little tremulous*) : I have always felt, Flo, that your real friends have been people outside the family. And I'm sometimes very sad and ashamed to think about it. We were so wrong about you, and we wanted to be so right. It must seem difficult for children to realise that their parents don't oppose things merely for the fun of it. But then you can never understand that until you have children of your own . . . and see what mistakes they try to make. It isn't just perversity, my dear.

FLORENCE : No, mamma, of course not. It's just the healthy English sense of proprietorship in other people's lives. And I'm not sure it's bad. After all, if an inclination isn't strong enough to survive discouragement there can't be much in it. And if it is it will come to thrive on difficulty and be all the better for it. People oughtn't to have things made too easy for them.

MRS. N. : No. But all the same—I do wish we'd realised *earlier*. It makes a mother feel so foolish when her daughter is decorated and publicly commended by the Queen for doing the very things that if the poor woman had had her way would never have been attempted at all ! . . . And really, of course, it's almost a contradiction of the Bible and everything one was brought up to believe when one finds that parents aren't

infallible—besides being *most* humiliating. And that isn't at all a nice way to feel, is it ?

FLORENCE (*laughing*) : Mamma dearest, you're so sweet about it that you almost make me wonder whether I was wrong in the first place.

MRS. N. (*seriously*) : My dear, you must never think that ! You've *proved* yourself right.

[*A clock strikes the half-hour.*

There now, that's half-past eleven. I've kept you from your work a whole hour. . . .

FLORENCE : Perhaps I ought to begin to get ready for Dr. Sutherland. . . . Would you like the carriage in half an hour's time ?

MRS. N. : Well now, *wouldn't* that be nice ? Yes, my love, I'll go and get ready.

[MRS. NIGHTINGALE *departs.*

FLORENCE (*to herself*) : So she *did* send out those nurses. She's been my enemy all along. And now she's taken Sidney away to become a hypochondriac. And she thinks she's won, and the work may go to the devil.

[*She strikes a bell. The* MAID *enters.*

FLORENCE : The carriage for Mrs. Nightingale in half an hour.

MAID : Yes, madam. . . . And there's a gentleman called. (*Rather impressed herself*) Lord Palmerston, madam.

FLORENCE : Has he ? Bring him at once.

[*The* MAID *goes beaming.* FLORENCE *opens the door communicating with the next room and calls through it.*

Scotty !

SUTHERLAND'S VOICE : Are ye ready for me? (*He appears in the door.*)

FLORENCE : No. Palmerston's called. Isn't that a triumph?

SUTHERLAND (*without enthusiasm*) : Aye. He's all right. He'll not dae much.

FLORENCE : Croaker! Let me know when the others arrive.

SUTHERLAND : Aye. I'll dae that.

[*He returns phlegmatically. The door is opened and* LORD PALMERSTON *enters.*

FLORENCE (*greeting him warmly*) : Lord Palmerston, this is more than kind. I half hoped when I wrote that you would let me come and see you. It never entered my mind that you would come here.

PALMERSTON : Ah—but you're my pupil in a sense. So I thought, like a good tutor, I ought to see you in your workroom. Besides, I was riding to the House of Commons. . . . Let me see how the "Nightingale power" is generated. They tell me you flatter your preceptors by holding a Cabinet in imitation of ours.

FLORENCE : As we call it. Yes.

PALMERSTON : Is it in session to-day?

FLORENCE : It is called for twelve o'clock.

PALMERSTON (*looking at his watch*) : In a quarter of an hour . . . May I attend it—unofficially?

FLORENCE : We shall be honoured.

PALMERSTON : Mind, I must warn you in advance that I can't promise more than sympathetic interest.

FLORENCE : More and more I realise what we lost in Sidney Herbert. No one will ever replace him. . . . What a tragedy !

PALMERSTON : Poor Herbert ! I think he felt it very deeply. And I think he felt it most on your account. We had a long talk when he finally brought his resignation. It was hopeless to go on.

FLORENCE : You valued him very much ?

PALMERSTON : More than anyone.

FLORENCE : And . . . I suppose . . . you blame me for his breakdown.

PALMERSTON : Just a little. . . . Gladstone did his bit—as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

FLORENCE : . . . Because our plans meant spending more money !

PALMERSTON : Precisely. Your new hospitals meant hundreds of thousands.

FLORENCE (*grimly*) : I'll remember Gladstone.

PALMERSTON : Yes, I should. He's not a man to be forgotten.

FLORENCE : And Sidney's illness dates from fighting Gladstone for my hospitals.

PALMERSTON : Substantially. Yes.

FLORENCE : He never told me.

PALMERSTON : How could he tell you what took place in the Cabinet? . . . There is an oath you know !

FLORENCE : . . . And it wasn't that he was afraid to stand up to Ben Hawes ?

PALMERSTON : Who, may I inquire, is Ben Hawes ? A pugilist ?

FLORENCE : He's the Permanent Under-Secretary at the War Office.

PALMERSTON : Oh ! Sir Benjamin Hawes. I know the man. But you know, Miss Nightingale, when the British Government decides that a thing is to be done—even something relatively small like the reform of the War Office, the permanent officials are far too wise to stand in the way. It's like the car of Juggernaut. Obstruction is tantamount to self-destruction. . . . Of course when the Cabinet is not of one mind that's another matter.

FLORENCE : . . . And so I've been unjust. . . .

PALMERSTON : To whom ?

FLORENCE : To Sidney Herbert.

PALMERSTON : If you blamed him—I think perhaps you have.

FLORENCE : Why didn't he tell me !

PALMERSTON : Miss Nightingale, don't forget that he once got into serious trouble by telling Cabinet secrets to a woman who was said to have sold them to *The Times*. I don't suppose he's forgotten his lesson.

FLORENCE : But he wouldn't suspect *me* of that. He couldn't.

PALMERSTON : No. But things have a way of getting into the papers. Suppose an article appeared and Gladstone raised the matter. Could Herbert deny that he'd told you ?—however convinced he might be that you were not the source of the article.

FLORENCE : Lord Palmerston, I'm afraid I've

been a very bad pupil. I don't seem to have learnt anything.

PALMERSTON (*indulgently*) : Do you remember my telling you that I waited twenty years at the War Office before accepting promotion? Now perhaps you understand why. You've been in public life since 1854—seven years altogether. Don't be impatient. You're doing very well!

FLORENCE : You don't really think that. After what you've just told me you can't think much of women in public life.

PALMERSTON (*drily*) : Oh, I don't know. I shouldn't be in the least surprised to find a woman in the Cabinet—say in 1930. You've started them. Perhaps you'll be old enough to see the new dispensation. Luckily I shall be comfortably underground.

FLORENCE : I think women ought to have votes, you know.

PALMERSTON : If I were convinced that men ought to have them I would perhaps be prepared to consider the case of women. My views however, don't matter. One old back number can't hold up the sequences of cause and effect that enthusiasts are pleased to call progress. We've begun to tinker with the franchise and we shall go on. Votes for men to-day. Votes for women to-morrow. Votes for babies in arms next week. Your sex will get the vote, my dear—and into Parliament—and into the Cabinet . . . and into Heaven if they aren't careful!

FLORENCE : . . . Lord Palmerston, when Sidney gets better—is it impossible for him to go back to the War Office?

PALMERSTON : But his health wouldn't allow it !

FLORENCE : I've had quite encouraging letters.

PALMERSTON : But immediately ? How could he ? He'd never stand the strain.

FLORENCE : No, not immediately. But say in a year, or even two years.

PALMERSTON : What do you suppose his wife would say ?

FLORENCE : . . . But it matters so enormously to the future.

PALMERSTON : You know, Miss Florence, I often ask myself whether our actions matter nearly as much to posterity, as it flatters us to believe they do.

FLORENCE (*flashing out*) : *Laissez-faire !* Your new Liberal creed. Hugger-mugger ; squalor ; confusion ; chaos. . . . Leave it to stew and the people to stew in it, because we're too lazy to work out new systems. And invent neat phrases to explain it away !

PALMERSTON (*quite unimpressed*) : My dear, I'm much too old to be evangelised. I'm willing to help in what you call your work because I happen to like you. But I'm not willing to abdicate my common sense and knowledge of human beings. Officials will always be stupid. The War Office will always mismanage wars and the country will win them in spite of it. If you do root out Sir Benjamin Hawes, you'll only root in someone else. You're not fighting corruption and abuse, that would be a different thing. You're fighting human nature.

FLORENCE : I don't believe that. There's such a thing as working for the sake of the work.

PALMERSTON (*cynically*) : Yes. Not in Whitehall. But go on thinking so if it comforts you.

FLORENCE : I believe you're deliberately trying to discourage me.

PALMERSTON : Perhaps I want to save you from disappointment.

FLORENCE (*dejectedly*) : Oh, I'd give *anything* to have Sidney back here again. He wasn't afraid of disappointments. He would have shared them . . .

[*A tap at the door and* DR. SUTHERLAND *puts in his head.*

SUTHERLAND : Miss Nightingale, the others are all here. . . . Oh, I beg pardon. I did not observe his Lordship.

FLORENCE : Lord Palmerston has kindly come to hear our views about the questions formerly dealt with by Mr. Herbert. . . .

PALMERSTON : I don't propose to take any steps, you know. That rests with the Secretary of State.

FLORENCE : But you'll bring them to his notice ?

PALMERSTON : Provided they seem to be desirable. But I will use no pressure.

FLORENCE (*to* SUTHERLAND) : Of course if we could have some reasonable hope that Lord Herbert would be back at work in a year or so—it might be better to postpone the War Office reforms until . . .

SUTHERLAND (*shrewdly*) : Aye. But what expectation can ye give that, even should he

completely recover, Lord Herbert will come back to public life?

PALMERSTON: It would depend on Lady Herbert.

FLORENCE (*reflectively*): Liz is a nuisance.

SUTHERLAND: Well, meanwhile as Lord Palmerston is here will we not accept his Lordship's good offices, and put him in possession of our scheme of reorganisation.

FLORENCE: It would at least be doing something. (*To* PALMERSTON) Perhaps—if we decided to leave the larger questions in abeyance——

[*A sound of voices in the passage.* FLORENCE *is on the way to the door to rebuke the offenders when it is thrown open.*

ELIZABETH HERBERT *stands on the threshold, travel-stained, drawn and in deep black.* MRS. NIGHTINGALE *hovers tearfully in the background.*

FLORENCE: . . . Elizabeth! You were in Germany . . .

ELIZABETH (*in a strangled voice*): I'm back again . . . Florence—I had to come to you. Sidney's—dead. I . . . I . . . (*She staggers and bursts into weeping.*) I can't believe it.

FLORENCE (*going to her*): My dear . . . my dear . . .

[ELIZABETH *collapses in her arms sobbing. But* FLORENCE *is beyond tears now.*

ELIZABETH (*inarticulate*): . . . He spoke of you . . . in his last words. . . . Not me! You . . . and your—unfinished work. . . .

[*A little pause.*

FLORENCE (*softly*) : He was our Leader and our dear Master—— And now that we know the greatness of our loss . . . we shall never see him again. . . .

THE CURTAIN FALLS

END OF ACT III

SCENE VII

SCENE : *A room in No. 10 South Street, Park Lane. Summer, 1886. Twenty-five years to a day have passed since the death of* SIDNEY HERBERT, *but the tireless energy of* FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE *is still unexhausted. From her sofa in South Street she directed the nursing arrangements for the Egyptian Expedition in the previous year. She has indoctrinated successive Viceroys of India with her views of sanitary reform and seen her ideas accepted and translated into law. A myriad of voluntary organisations have pursued and consolidated her hospital policy. And even the barrack rebuilding schemes—abandoned for want of allies at the time of* LORD HERBERT'S *death—have at last borne fruit in the allocation of four million pounds by the Government for their execution. Her life's work has prospered. It may be said to be complete. All that now remains is to safeguard it from destruction.*

FLORENCE *is tucked up on a sofa in a white panelled bedroom with a broad table of writing materials at her elbow. There is a formidable battery of blue books on the shelf behind her head. A young* NURSE, *neatly dressed, pretty, stands waiting for orders.* FLORENCE *is scanning a small slip of paper a little indecisively.*

FLORENCE (*at last*) : Why should I break my rule for him ? No. Not without an appointment.

NURSE (*timorous—between two giants*) : It's Mr. Gladstone himself, Miss Nightingale. He's down there waiting.

FLORENCE (*gently but firmly*) : Not without an appointment. Perhaps Dr. Sutherland will see him later.

NURSE (*quaking*) : Er—er—is he to be told ?

FLORENCE : He's a gifted man ; but I don't think even his own party credit him with the power of divination.

NURSE (*abashed*) : No, Miss Nightingale.

FLORENCE (*providing the necessary formula*) : Miss Nightingale sees nobody without an appointment. She has to make that inflexible rule—otherwise her work would be impossible, and her work is the only purpose of her existence. Do you understand ? That is what he will be told. With Miss Nightingale's deep regret.

NURSE (*giving it up*) : Yes, Miss Nightingale.

FLORENCE : You'll get the words exactly right ?

NURSE : Oh, yes, Miss Nightingale. (*Her lips mutter it over.*)

FLORENCE (*affectionately*) : Now I'm going to scold you. You're handicapping yourself. By fussing about your work. That isn't the way to get results. Whatever you undertake, from running a hospital to running an errand, never let the look of your task defeat you. *You* must defeat it. That's the way Hercules did his labours. He said, " I'm bigger than any task that can be imagined." And so he was !

NURSE (*protesting*) : I'm not afraid of work, Miss Nightingale—really.

FLORENCE : No, dear. I didn't say you weren't working. I said you allowed things to worry you. You're terrified of going to Mr. Gladstone with my message. Why ? You're only my mouthpiece.

NURSE : . . . He's such a . . . tremendously great man !

FLORENCE : Well—but if you're going to do anything in the world, you must get accustomed to facing tremendously great men and tremendously great odds and tremendously great issues! When you've decided what is right, don't let all the tremendously great bogies in the world frighten you. Do you think people would pay attention to my opinion if I said, " I'm only a poor woman and you're a tremendously great man and so you must be right and I must be wrong "? Do you think I should have beaten the whole Army Medical Department, with all their resounding names, and half the Cabinet secretly behind them—up in arms at the monstrosity of being dictated to by a woman—if I'd meekly accepted their tremendously great rubbish? Or that I should have won the Viceroys to my way of thinking and got some kind of elementary sanitation introduced among those poor neglected famine-ridden villages in India? Or got decent barracks provided? . . . They were all tremendously great men and the so-called experts were all tremendously sure they were right. But they weren't, and one by one they've had to admit it and one by one the causes for which I've fought have been carried to victory. And other women can do the same. You can do the same. But not by worshipping the fetish of the tremendous superiority of the male!

NURSE (*carried away*) : I'll try. I'll try, Miss Nightingale.

FLORENCE (*smiling*) : Good baby. . . . Now go and put poor Mr. Gladstone out of his misery.

NURSE (*rather like a small boy steeling himself to go to the headmaster's study*) : Yes, Miss Nightingale.

[*She departs.*

FLORENCE *resumes her writing.*

A tap at the door and DR. SUTHERLAND *puts in his head—a grey, lined, weatherbeaten head by now. He is over eighty, worn out in the service of* MISS NIGHTINGALE'S *demon of efficiency. His soft Aberdonian accent is as broad as ever.*

SUTHERLAND : Will I come in ?

FLORENCE : If you're not afraid to see an untidy old woman in bed.

SUTHERLAND : Not up to-day ? What ails ye ?

FLORENCE : Can't waste what little nervous energy I still possess on the meaningless fatigue of dressing up.

SUTHERLAND : Little nervous energy. Hoots ! I'd dae fine—on one quarter of yours. It's physical strength ye lack. (*Affectionately*) Will ye never lairn tae gie yourself a chance ? It's an everlasting wonder tae me what way you're still alive !

FLORENCE : Croak ! Croak ! Croak ! Why didn't you live in ancient Athens ?

SUTHERLAND : Tae sing in the frog chorus of Aristophanes. Aye. It wouldnae hae been anyway uncongenial.

FLORENCE : You ought to be singing pæans of joy. Do you know what to-day is ?

SUTHERLAND : Aye. Monday.

FLORENCE : One might have known with your incurable looseness of thought that you wouldn't know the date. It's August 2nd. The twenty-fifth anniversary of Sidney's death !

SUTHERLAND : I see naething whatever tae be singing a pæan of joy for in that

FLORENCE : But isn't it something to sing for that after twenty-five years, by sticking and sticking our ground and never admitting defeat and never giving in, we've done his work at last and won his battle ? . . . Do you know who is coming to see me to-day ?

SUTHERLAND (*promptly*) : Meester Gladstone. I saw him as I passed in.

FLORENCE : No. I'm not seeing him. . . . Elizabeth Herbert. For the first time since Sidney's death.

SUTHERLAND (*astonished*) : What way are ye no' seein' him ?

FLORENCE : Gladstone ? . . . My fellow-assassin ? To-day of all days ! . . . We killed Sidney between us. I couldn't have seen him to-day. Luckily he hadn't asked for an appointment so it wasn't necessary to be . . . discourteous.

SUTHERLAND (*impatiently*) : Will ye never get this bee aboot Sidney Hairbert oot of your heid ? The man de'ed o' pulmonary disease ; and I'm fair wearit wi' repeatin' that ye had nae mair tae dae wi' his death than wi' the murder of Julius Cæsar.

FLORENCE : That's so like a doctor. Seize on the physical symptoms and pay no attention to the contributory causes. I suppose you'd admit if a baby died of rheumatic fever that the nurse who wrapped it in wet clothes day after day was to some extent responsible ?

SUTHERLAND (*patiently*) : Ah weel, if you're like Rachael, and will no' be comfortit. . . . What will ye be sayin' tae Lady Hairbert ?

FLORENCE : I don't know. We've written to each other once a year—on this day—ever since he died. But we never met.

SUTHERLAND : Then ye'll be enjoyin' a bonnie afternoon, I'm thinkin'! . . . Maybe I'll no be tellin' ye just now. . . .

FLORENCE : . . . Telling me what? Come on. Out with it.

SUTHERLAND : I'm resignin' ma post in the Government.

FLORENCE : . . . I thought it was early to be rejoicing about our work. You're going to desert and leave it all to be undone.

SUTHERLAND (*patiently*) : What guid will it dae if I kill myself in harness? Dae ye no realise I'm eighty an' more years of age? Ye'll be far better wi' a younger man. I thocht it would be exactly as ye would wish.

FLORENCE : Exactly what I would wish—to be deprived of the only person whose opinion I care tuppence about? How like a man to say a thing like that—and to imagine it would take in anyone but a man!

SUTHERLAND : Well, then, I'll say I think it is what ye ought to wish.

FLORENCE : Ah! Now we're beginning to get it clearer. If you thought I ought to but weren't sure that I would—why didn't you come and ask me? . . . It's the accursed thing about working with people. They make themselves indispensable and then desert you. Or else they die.

SUTHERLAND (*gently*) : Mebbe that they must do the former in order tae avoid the latter. An' ma work is no longer what it used tae be. . . . Lassie, lassie, I'm gey an' vexed tae be leavin' ye. Hae

I no devoted all my leisure and all my dear wife's leisure tae be helpin' you—however humbly—because I minded sae weel the day when yon puir laddie de'ed, an' how ma hairt went oot tae ye in your grief; an' the grand way ye handled yoursel'? But in this world the one thing certain is that the hour o' pairtin' will strike at last. An' the hour o' John Sutherland, M.D., has struck!

FLORENCE: Scotty! Scotty! Scotty! What am I to do without you? Won't you come and see me?

SUTHERLAND: Aye. An' while ma strength holds I'll dae what I can wi' your personal correspondence and the preparation of drafts. But responsible public office an' me must be pairted.

[*The* NURSE *comes to the door.*

NURSE: Lady Herbert of Lea has arrived.

FLORENCE: As soon as Dr. Sutherland goes. . . . What are my appointments for this afternoon?

NURSE: After Lady Herbert, at 4.30 there's the President of the American Red Cross. At five, the Secretary of State for India. At 5.30, the Crimean War veterans. And you said keep six o'clock free in case Dr. Sutherland wanted you.

FLORENCE: Yes. Bring Lady Herbert. (*To the* NURSE.)

[*The* NURSE *goes.*

Old friend, will you come back and discuss this further at six?

SUTHERLAND: I will come at six or at midnight, or at any time that suits the convenience of ma

dearest friend in the world, an' I will go on till ma puir old heid drops off—if it wull anyway please her.

NURSE : . . . Lady Herbert of Lea.

[ELIZABETH *has changed and hardened in twenty-five years. She is now a Roman Catholic convert ; and her eye gleams with just a touch of religious fanaticism.* SUTHERLAND *bows without waiting to speak to her and follows the* NURSE *from the room.*

ELIZABETH : Well, Florence. . . . I don't know why I've come. I didn't mean to.

FLORENCE (*gently*) : Why not, Liz ?

ELIZABETH : It's better to bury the past completely. I don't want to remember.

FLORENCE : I don't want to forget. . . . Liz. . . . Won't it gladden you to hear that Sidney's work has been accomplished at last ?

ELIZABETH : Frankly, not in the least. . . . I did what I could when Sidney was alive to help him. I did it because I loved him—not because I loved what he was doing. If he'd been a farmer I should have ploughed the land beside him with the same delight and pride. . . . But after his death I would never have gone near the farm again. I should have hated the place. Especially if it had killed him.

FLORENCE : Does that mean you . . . hate me ?

ELIZABETH : You're not a place, Florence. . . . In my religion one is not allowed to hate people. One is taught to pray for them.

FLORENCE (*unable to resist irony*) : Am I to ascribe my . . . good health to your intercessions, Liz ?

[*An awkward pause.*

ELIZABETH : . . . I thought I'd taught myself to forget Sidney. The pain of separation, I mean. One can do remarkable things by concentrating the mind on religious meditation. But I haven't forgotten and I shall never forget.

FLORENCE (*gently*) : Wouldn't it have been easier for you—not to forget, but to remember happily, if you'd carried on his work with us ?

ELIZABETH : Work is your panacea for everything.

FLORENCE : And yours is meditation. But meditation stands still. Work takes you on, exulting in the final triumph of the dead. And when that has been reached you can sing, as I do, the *Nunc dimittis*. . . .

ELIZABETH : Yes. Don't forget, though, that the Lord has a way of choosing His own time for letting His servants depart in peace !

FLORENCE : . . . You mean one might live on and on—unable to work and unable to die. . . . That might be my punishment.

ELIZABETH : Yes, Florence . . . it might. Or rather your . . . purgatory. Which we must all endure. . . .

[*The* NURSE *taps and enters with a tray.*

FLORENCE : You'll have some tea, Liz ?

ELIZABETH : Thank you.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE VIII

The drawing-room of No. 10 South Street. The winter of 1907–08. A NURSE *is looking on while two men make preparations for an approaching ceremony. Gilt chairs are being set out for a small audience. A third man puts his head in at the door—a red-faced little man with a husky voice, clad in rather assertive garments.*

NEWCOMER : This where they're going to do it ?

THE NURSE : Who are you ?

NEWCOMER (*showing a card*) : Press. . . . (*He looks about him with professional eye, scribbles something in a note-book and then, addressing one of the other men, proceeds*) Give me an idea, ol' man, what it's all about.

" OL' MAN " (*a rather supercilious young gentleman with a foppish moustache*) : It's an investiture, don't you know.

PRESSMAN (*frankly*) : Not very much in my line, ol' man, tell you the truth. I'm on the sporting staff, matter o' fact. But there's so much happening in London to-day—you know that fire in Holborn, three inquests, big society divorce, Party meeting at the Caxton 'all– all the regular reporters were used up so, as we're slack in the sports, they sent me here to cover this. . . . What's the story, ol' man ?

" OL' MAN " (*rather bored*) : I've told you. It's an investiture.

PRESSMAN : Well, I dessay, but what exactly is an investiture, ol' man ? I'd know if it was a spring 'andicap.

" OL' MAN " (*peevishly*) : I say really, I wish you wouldn't interrupt me. I'm busy. And my

name isn't Holman, you know, it's Montague-Worsley-Tankerton. I belong to the Household.

PRESSMAN : Sorry, ol' man. . . . (*To the* NURSE) Miss Nightingale was a nurse herself, wasn't she ? (*Proudly*) I know. Crimean War.

NURSE : Yes.

PRESSMAN : Who's goin' to be here to-day ? All the nobs ?

NURSE (*proudly*) : Oh, yes. The Secretary of State. The Lord Mayor. Someone from Buckingham Palace——

PRESSMAN : Yes ? Who's that—do you know ?

NURSE : The Court Chamberlain.

PRESSMAN : Yes. Who else ?

NURSE : Oh, Miss Nightingale's friends and relations. And some of the Crimean veterans.

PRESSMAN : Now what exactly is this investiture ?

NURSE : It's the Order of Merit, you know.

PRESSMAN : Why are they giving it to her ?

[*The* NURSE *looks at him indignantly.*

Oh, I know. The Crimea. Sorry to seem ignorant. Not much time for reading history at our game, y' know. . . . Hullo. *You* got medals I see ! What for ?

THE NURSE : The Boer War.

PRESSMAN : Well now just fancy that ! I didn't know they gave women medals. They'll be putting you all in khaki next——

[*A tall, dignified man enters the room.*

NURSE : Yes. Who is it please ?

NEWCOMER (*pontifically*) : I am the representative of *The Times*.

NURSE : Oh ! There's a colleague of yours here. This gentleman. . . . Er . . . Mister . . .

[*The* PRESSMAN *approaches*.

" THE TIMES " (*chilly*) : Oh. . . . Are you—er—connected with the Press ?

PRESSMAN (*cheerfully*) : That's right, ol' man.

" THE TIMES " (*with awful courtesy*) : May I enquire what paper you represent ?

PRESSMAN : Matter of fact, I'm only a News Agency. Racing Reporter. But we're so full of assignments I had to take this on. Give us a hand, ol' man. I don't know the first thing about it.

" THE TIMES " (*benevolently*) : Oh ! Well, you'd better sit with me and I'll tell you who everyone is. . . . (*To the* NURSE) Do you know who's in charge of the arrangements ?

NURSE (*pointing to the elder of the two acolytes*) : He's the Master of the Ceremonies, isn't he ?

" THE TIMES " (*chuckling*) : Master of the Ceremonies ? For goodness' sake, don't let him hear you call him that ! He's a pursuivant of the College of Heralds. (*Approaching him*) Excuse me.

PURSUIVANT (*courteously, but firmly*) : I'm sorry. I haven't time to talk. The Secretary of State has arrived. . . . (*Over his shoulder*) If you want the Press seats, they're in that corner. (*He hurries to the door.*)

PRESSMAN : What did you call him ?

" THE TIMES " : Pursuivant. Why ?

PRESSMAN (*making a note*) : Just want to tip him as a double with Court Chamberlain. . . . Is this where we go ?

[*They seat themselves. A fine-looking military man in a gorgeous official uniform enters. This is the Court Chamberlain.* PURSUIVANT *approaches him.*

CHAMBERLAIN : All ready ?

PURSUIVANT : Nearly. The Secretary of State's arrived. . . . Tankerton, you'd better take the door.

[*The* SECRETARY OF STATE *enters, frock-coated and suave.*

THE SECRETARY OF STATE (*greeting them*) : . . . d'ye do. . . . (*To* PURSUIVANT) What's the programme ?

PURSUIVANT : We must wait a minute for the Lord Mayor.

[*A steady influx of people begins. They are shown to their seats by* TANKERTON. *The Press seats fill.*

Members of the Diplomatic Corps arrive.

TANKERTON (*at the door*) : The President of the American Red Cross.

[*The* PRESIDENT *joins the* SECRETARY OF STATE, COURT CHAMBERLAIN *and* PURSUIVANT. *Greetings are exchanged. A number of Crimean veterans are shown into their places. Members of the Nightingale family begin to arrive. Among them are a young married woman and her two small children—a boy and a girl.*

THE BOY (*enviously*) : Oo ! What lovely uniforms!

MOTHER (*distractedly*) : Ssh ! Darling, you mustn't.

[*She flashes a deprecating smile at the* COURT CHAMBERLAIN, *who smiles and bows in return.*

CHAMBERLAIN : How do you do ? What jolly youngsters.

MOTHER : Are they ? You try looking after them.

GIRL : Can we talk to Aunt Florence, mamma ?

MOTHER : No, darling. You can see her. . . . And try to imitate her when you grow up.

BOY (*determined to outvie his sister*) : *I* shall imitate her in the nursery to-night.

MOTHER : Ssh ! *Darling* ! And I didn't mean that sort of imitation, you silly imp. Now, be quiet, both of you, and watch the people.

TANKERTON (*at the door*) : The Lady Herbert of Lea.

[ELIZABETH HERBERT, *now past her eightieth year, but still in possession of her faculties, enters. She is a religieuse, wears deep black and carries a rosary. Her sallow face is seamed with wrinkles. The* SECRETARY OF STATE *hurries to greet her.*

MOTHER : Look, children. There's one of Aunt Florence's oldest friends. You've heard me talk about Sidney Herbert. That's his wife.

GIRL : Oo ! Let me see.

[*After a moment's conversation at the door, the* SECRETARY OF STATE *conducts* ELIZABETH *to the place reserved for her. As she passes through the room, those who recognise her stand and bow. Among them is the* MOTHER *of the children.* ELIZABETH *replies to these demonstrations with a grave inclination of her head. But she says nothing.*

BOY : Mummy ! She didn't say anything to you.

MOTHER : No, darling. Old ladies aren't expected to stop and talk to young ones.

GIRL (*curiously*) : Are *you* a young lady, mummy?

MOTHER (*sternly*) : You must be quiet, both of you. Or I'll take you away.

S. OF STATE (*addressing* ELIZABETH) : I hope the seat is comfortable.

ELIZABETH : Quite, thank you . . . (*Looking round*) Where is *she*?

S. OF STATE : Not down yet, Lady Herbert. She isn't very . . . strong now, you know.

ELIZABETH : Strong? She's lasted uncommonly well for a weak woman. She was too strong for poor Sidney. . . .

TANKERTON (*at the door*) : The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of London.

S. OF STATE : Oh—Excuse me, please.

[*He hurries to greet the* LORD MAYOR, *who has entered in full robes, followed by a train-bearer and two Sheriffs. The room by now is nearly full.*

LORD MAYOR : Ah! How d'ye do. How d'ye do.

[*An exchange of greetings. The* COURT CHAMBERLAIN *and* PURSUIVANT *join them.*

They draw aside for a short discussion of the agenda.

S. OF STATE : Are we ready now?

PURSUIVANT : Yes. In just a moment. . . . The order of the proceedings : The Home Secretary to speak first. Then the American Ambassador. Then the Lord Mayor of London. No other speeches and everything quite short, because Miss Nightingale is not strong enough for anything protracted. Then the Court Chamberlain makes the investiture on behalf of His Majesty. Then the Sheriffs bring forward the Roll of

Freemen for Miss Nightingale to sign. That is all. Is that satisfactory ?

LORD MAYOR : Yes. (*Over his shoulder to the Sheriffs*) Do you understand ? Is it all right ?

[*They nod.*

Yes, that will do.

[*A whispered colloquy in the background. The* SECRETARY OF STATE *comes forward.*

S. OF STATE : Oh—er—— The Military Attaché to the German Embassy desires to present an offering from the German Government.

PURSUIVANT : That can follow the signing of the Roll of Freeman.

S. OF STATE : Yes. (*He turns and explains.*)

LORD MAYOR : Well . . . hadn't we better begin? I've a meeting at the Mansion House at half-past five, and an official dinner afterwards. . . . (*To his train-bearer*) Where are those notes I gave you ? (*They are handed to him—he takes them nervously. To* PURSUIVANT, *nervously*) Er—that place Scutari. Was that where the hospitals were ?

PURSUIVANT : I don't know, I'm afraid. . . . Will you take your place now, Lord Mayor ?

LORD MAYOR : Yes, certainly.

[*The official party begin to move to their appointed places. The buzz of conversation in the room is partly stilled. One or two voices cut through.*

WOMAN'S VOICE : . . . We went to see *Miss Gibbs* at the Gaiety. Grossmith is too *charming*.

ANOTHER : Yes. I prefer The Follies myself.

WOMAN'S VOICE : Oh, isn't Pelissier too sweet ! What's that thing he sings ? " My old Dutchman," isn't it ?

ANOTHER : No, dear. That's Chevalier.

THEIR CAVALIER : I say. Don't talk. They're going to begin.

[TANKERTON *has crossed from the main door to the smaller door at the other end of the room. He stands with it half open.*

GIRL (*in a piercing voice*) : Mummy, is that man the footman ?

MOTHER : Darling, do be quiet !

[*An expectant hush falls over the room.*

TANKERTON (*in the smaller doorway*) : Miss Florence Nightingale !

[*All stand.*

An apple-cheeked, benign old woman of eighty-seven is wheeled into the room in a great chair. This is FLORENCE. *Majestic in her great age—a legendary figure in her own lifetime—she is wheeled to the place reserved for her. The room becomes the audience-chamber of a queen. She acknowledges her reception with little smiling bows.*

PURSUIVANT (*as if calling for silence.*) : . . . The Secretary of State !

S. OF STATE : We are met to-day to witness the recognition of services to this country and to humanity in general, begun when our fathers were young men and continued without intermission almost to the present day. The distinguished lady whom we are here to honour may justly claim to be the founder of modern nursing ; and the great and increasingly beneficial work done by the hospitals for sick

humanity, not in this land alone, but in all civilised lands, is the fruit of her labours. And her fame does not rest alone on her hospital reforms. In the darkest days of the Crimean War,

[*Applause.*

when wounds and sickness had decimated the British Army, this devoted heroine moved like a ministering angel among our soldiers.

> Lo ! In that hour of misery
> A lady with a lamp I see
> Pass through the glimmering gloom
> And flit from room to room ;
> And slow, as in a dream of bliss
> The speechless sufferer turns to kiss
> Her shadow as it falls
> Upon the darkening walls.

Miss Nightingale's services to humanity are such as no one has yet been able to assess or measure. By her unresting diligence she has stirred up a spirit of compassion with suffering that, please God, will never be allowed to die.

[*Loud applause.*

Such services are worthy of notable recognition. His Majesty has been pleased to direct that they should be notably recognised. The Order of Merit, of which Miss Nightingale is the first woman member, numbers upon its roll many noble servants of the country. None, however, has a better title to that most illustrious distinction than this latest member, whose admission we are privileged to attend.

[*Applause. He resumes his place. A buzz of conversation.*

PURSUIVANT (*quelling the disturbance with a glance round the room. Silence again.*) : . . . The President of the American Red Cross.

PRESIDENT : Ladies and gentlemen. It is not for the representative of another country to speak on matters that are primarily of domestic concern. But Miss Nightingale is not domestic. She is an international possession. (*Applause.*) She is of Great Britain ; but she does not belong to Great Britain. She belongs to the world ; and the world is very, very proud of her saintly daughter. The International Conference of the Red Cross Societies, which has just concluded its session in London City, is the proof of my words ; for that Conference would never have existed but for the achievements, the practical achievements of this great pioneer of healing. In the United States of America the name of Florence Nightingale is revered with a love that is peculiarly personal and tender. There is no monument of stone to her and we cannot confer a decoration. We have no such things. But there are one thousand Nurse Training Schools in America founded in her name. Those are her monument—an ever-increasing monument. Those are her medals from the United States.

[*Applause. He resumes his seat.*

PURSUIVANT : The Right Honourable The Lord Mayor of London.

LORD MAYOR (*abandoning his notes*) : I had intended to make some remarks about—er—Scutari, where the—er—the hospitals were. And about the Crimean War. But I feel that is rather superfluous. We all know Miss Nightingale's noble deeds. (*Applause.*) They were noble. They were very noble. I—er—remember reading that she nearly lost her own life nursing the wounded in those—er—dreadful surroundings. And it gives me—it is a great privilege to say that the Common Council of the City of London desire to confer on this most excellent

lady the Freedom of the City of London, which we beg her to accept.

[*He resumes his seat amidst applause.*

CHAMBERLAIN (*stepping forward*) : Miss Florence Nightingale, I am commanded by His Majesty the King to convey to you the insignia of the Order of Merit, which His Majesty has been graciously pleased to confer upon you in recognition of your invaluable services to the country and to humanity.

[*He approaches and puts the insignia in her hands.*

FLORENCE (*with her smiling bow*) : . . . Most kind. Most kind. (*To her* NURSE) What is it, dear? (*Vaguely*) They must be thanked.

THE NURSE (*opening the box*) : It's from the King, darling. Put it over your shoulders.

FLORENCE (*allowing the riband to be slipped over her head*) : Certainly, certainly. How very, very kind.

[*Clapping of hands among the company.*

(*To the* NURSE) Why are they doing that?

THE NURSE : It's the Crimea, darling.

FLORENCE : Oh. . . . Yes. . . . (*Louder*) All I can tell you about the Crimea, is how brave the soldiers were . . .

A HUSKY VOICE (*from among the Crimean veterans*) : Ah ! An' 'ow brave you was too, miss !

FLORENCE : Who's that?

THE NURSE : One of the Crimean veterans.

FLORENCE : My brave soldiers. I've never forgotten their cheerfulness with each other and their gentleness to me. And people tried to make me believe that the British soldier was coarse

and brutal and debased. But I knew better. And they proved I was right. . . . Bless them. (*Her head droops at the unforeseen exertion of the little speech.*)

THE NURSE (*in sharp undertone to* PURSUIVANT) : Come on, come on !

[*The* SHERIFFS *approach with the Roll of Freemen.*

FLORENCE (*rousing herself*) : What's this ?

THE NURSE : This is the Roll for you to sign. (*To the* SHERIFF *who holds it.*) Give me the pen. She can't see (*touching her eyes to signify blindness*).

FLORENCE : . . . Why am I to sign this ?

THE NURSE : They've given you the Freedom of the City of London.

FLORENCE : Too kind. . . . (*With the nurse's help she laboriously initials the Roll.*) . . . Tell Doctor Sutherland !

[*The* SHERIFFS *give place to the* GERMAN MILITARY ATTACHÉ.

THE MILITARY ATTACHÉ (*presenting a great bouquet of flowers*) : My master the Emperor begs Miss Nightingale to accept these flowers picked by him near her old home.

FLORENCE (*mechanically*) : Too kind—too kind !

[*One by one, headed by the American, the distinguished company file before her bowing, and leave the room. Last comes* ELIZABETH HERBERT. *The* SECRETARY OF STATE *tarries to give her his arm.* ELIZABETH *and* FLORENCE *are once more face to face.*

S. OF STATE (*with gentle insistence*) : You remember your old friend, Lady Herbert, Miss Nightingale ?

FLORENCE : What is he saying ?

THE NURSE : Lady Herbert. . . . Look, darling. It's Lady Herbert.

FLORENCE : She was so lovely. Such pretty ways. We were friends till he died. . . . But I lost her.

ELIZABETH (*faltering*) : Florence . . . don't you know me ?

FLORENCE : It's so sad how one loses them. All my pets are gone. My friends never come now. (*To the* NURSE.) Have you sent for Dr. Sutherland ? (*Handing over the bouquet.*) You must give these and ask him to draft an answer.

THE NURSE (*in an undertone*) : He's been dead fifteen years, you know.

S. OF STATE (*to* LADY HERBERT) : She doesn't remember you I'm afraid.

ELIZABETH : I'll go. (*Suddenly bending her head, she kisses her great contemporary's hand.*)

FLORENCE : . . . Who did that ? That was Liz ! I know that was Liz . . . She went away from me such a long time ago . . . If one only had one's sight.

ELIZABETH : Florence !

FLORENCE : Her voice too . . .

ELIZABETH : . . . Shall we forgive each other ?

FLORENCE : . . . As we forgive them that trespass against us . . .

THE NURSE (*firmly*) : My lady. You must go ! . . . No, sir, you can't speak to her again. I won't be responsible.

[*With the difference still unhealed,* ELIZABETH *goes slowly out on the arm of the* HOME SECRETARY.

THE NURSE (*tenderly to her charge*) : Now, darling, we must get you to bed and you must have a good rest before your supper. . . . Would you like an egg to-night ?

[*She rings.*

FLORENCE (*obediently*) : Yes, dear.

THE NURSE (*petting her*) : You're tired out and no wonder.

[*A second nurse enters.*

FLORENCE : They were so kind. So very kind. (*Brightly.*) I don't know what they were all talking about. . . . We must ask Dr. Sutherland.

[*The nurses begin wheeling her away.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE END OF THE PLAY

SUCH MEN ARE DANGEROUS

PERSONS

PAUL I., Czar of Russia

ALEXANDER, the Czarevitch

COUNT PAHLEN, Governor of Petersburg

ANNA, BARONESS OSTERMANN

THE CHANCELLOR

THE ADJUTANT

THE CHAMBERLAIN

STEPAN

AN ENGLISH DOCTOR

COUNT VALERIAN SUBOFF
DUKE PLATO SUBOFF
GENERAL TALYSIN
A STAFF CAPTAIN
} Members of Pahlen's confederacy

OFFICERS, SOLDIERS, SERVANTS

The scene is St. Petersburg, in 1801

SUCH MEN ARE DANGEROUS

A Play in Eight Scenes

adapted by

ASHLEY DUKES

from

"The Patriot" *by* ALFRED NEUMANN

"Yond' Cassius has a lean and hungry look;
He thinks too much: such men are dangerous."

SUCH MEN ARE DANGEROUS

BY ALFRED NEUMANN ADAPTED BY ASHLEY DUKES

CAST OF CHARACTERS

in the Order of their Appearance

Count Pahlen	MATHESON LANG
Ivan	STANLEY HOWLETT
Anna (Baroness Ostermann)	ISOBEL ELSOM
The Chancellor	HARCOURT WILLIAMS
The Adjutant	WALTER MENPES
The Chamberlain	JOHN GARSIDE
A Staff Captain	FRANK NAPIER
A Corporal	JOHN MUNRO
Stepan	DONALD WOLFIT
Paul I	ROBERT FARQUHARSON
The Czar's Footman	OLIVER WAKEFIELD
Alexander (the Czarevitch)	GYLES ISHAM
The English Doctor	DONALD R. YOUNG
Count Valerian Suboff	STANLEY HOWLETT
General Talysin	WALTER PLINGE

Soldiers, Courtiers, Servants, etc.

The play produced by MATHESON LANG *and* REGINALD DENHAM, KING'S THEATRE, *Edinburgh, February 6th, 1928,* DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE, *London, September 19th, 1928*

SUCH MEN ARE DANGEROUS *was produced in New York by Gilbert Miller in January 1928, under the title* THE PATRIOT.

The performing rights of this play are the property of Matheson Lang, 11 Gerrard Street, London, W.1.

SCENE I

The study of PAHLEN'S *house in Petersburg.*

When the curtain rises he is seated at a desk reading a despatch.

PAHLEN : Crafty England—simple England !

[*He tears up the despatch, rises and tosses the fragments into the fire. A* FOOTMAN *appears.* PAHLEN *turns upon him sharply.*

What, is the Chancellor here already ?

FOOTMAN : No, Excellency, but the Baroness insists on seeing your Excellency.

PAHLEN : What Baroness ? You mean the Baroness Ostermann ?

FOOTMAN : Yes, Excellency.

PAHLEN : Then why do you not say so, fellow ?

FOOTMAN : I beg your Excellency's pardon. May I show her in ?

PAHLEN : No ! All my apologies to the Baroness ; tell her I am engaged.

[*He turns his back.* ANNA *appears behind the perplexed footman, whom she seems to thrust aside as she enters. He withdraws and closes the door behind her.* PAHLEN *turns to find her smiling at him.*

ANNA : My dear Pahlen, since when have your footmen shown me in and out of your presence ? You need not tell me these are not your hours for women ! I guessed I should not be interrupting a *tête-à-tête.*

PAHLEN (*after formally kissing her hand*): Then you were wrong, my dear Baroness. We know each other well enough to be frank. I am expecting another visitor this evening.

ANNA : Your footman was politer, and not so clumsy. Oh, you know I am not jealous, but mysteries intrigue me. Why do you scowl at me like a bear ?

PAHLEN : Listen, Anna. When I have secrets to keep, you had better take no interest in them.

ANNA : Those fierce eyes of yours tell me something, Peter.

PAHLEN : What, may I ask ?

ANNA : They tell me why I came to you tonight. I must have felt a longing, a homesickness for you. Yes, I have such foolish weaknesses at times.

PAHLEN : My dear Anna, in vain is the net spread in the sight of the bear. I happen not to be interested in women at this moment. I am awaiting a minister of the Crown on official business. If you think that a dull excuse, you are welcome to find some more romantic explanation for my coldness.

ANNA : I know your nature by this time, Peter—and your ways. You staked our fortunes together on one throw. While you play I stand beside you, and when you make mistakes I am the first to notice them. You have made one now.

PAHLEN : Are you sure of that, *ma chère* ?

ANNA : If your official interview is to be really secret, then you are wrong to keep it so dark. I will not flatter you by suspecting a woman in the case. I know that Petersburg is whispering of other things than scandal. I know that Russia looks to you for her salvation—though maybe

she builds a cross for you as well. When madmen sit on thrones——

PAHLEN : Do you know what you are saying, Baroness ? Have you forgotten that in this country a thoughtless word may cost a life ?

ANNA (*alarmed*) : But, Piotr, my Piotr, I meant no harm ! You see I had made all my plans to spend to-night with you. Perhaps I showed my disappointment, that was all. Surely you will not turn me out into the snow ! I have my own rooms here ; I promise I will go to them and leave you undisturbed.

PAHLEN : Once more, Anna, I am sorry that I cannot entertain you this evening. Perhaps your own indiscretions are to blame for that. You shall be driven home in my carriage.

[*The* FOOTMAN *has returned, and makes a sign to him.*

That is to say, you will be as welcome as ever, Baroness. But pray withdraw to your own rooms —just for the present.

[*In her ear, as he accompanies her to the door.*

I do not wish you to be seen. . . . (*Raising his voice.*) And now pray excuse me, Baroness.

ANNA (*perplexed*) : Shall we meet again this evening ?

PAHLEN : Maybe, maybe.

[ANNA *goes out.* PAHLEN *makes sure she is out of hearing before he returns to the* FOOTMAN.

FOOTMAN : Is your Excellency ready to receive the Chancellor now ?

PAHLEN : One moment, Ivan. The Baroness

must know nothing of this visitor. She will not leave her room while he is in the house, and not a word will be said of our interview. Now you may admit him.

FOOTMAN (*bows to signify his understanding, goes out, and returns, announcing*) : His Excellency the Imperial Chancellor.

[*The* CHANCELLOR, *an aristocrat in the late thirties, wearing a black civilian coat, pauses on the threshold as if the light of the room or* PAHLEN'S *glance were too strong for him. Then he goes up to the other and offers his hand.*

CHANCELLOR : Well, Excellency, you see I have come ! (*Striving to conceal his agitation.*) Thank God your house is warm ! Winter is early upon us.

PAHLEN : Pray be seated, my dear Chancellor. Take the warmest place you can find—but not too far away from me. You and I must keep close together, must we not ?

CHANCELLOR (*nervously*) : Just so, just so.

[*He seats himself.*

PAHLEN : I am obliged to you for coming plainly dressed, as I suggested. There are spies everywhere—yes, even round the Governor's house. I confess I would rather the Palace did not hear of this evening's interview. You understand me ?

CHANCELLOR : Not altogether, Excellency—if you will pardon me. As Governor of Petersburg and head of the Administration, why should you not receive a Minister in your own headquarters ? In these mistrustful days, I should have thought concealment——

PAHLEN : More dangerous than open dealing ? That depends, my dear Chancellor, on our conversation to-night.

CHANCELLOR : Our conversation ?

PAHLEN · Can you not guess what its subject will be ?

CHANCELLOR (*with an effort*) : No !

PAHLEN (*gravely*) : Can you not guess, Nikita Petrovitch ? Is there no foreboding in your face ? Come, my friend, I do not wish to force your hand, but we two can afford nothing less than the utmost, innermost frankness with each other.

CHANCELLOR (*avoiding his glance*) : I think you wish to discuss the unhappy state of our country.

PAHLEN : Yes, of our country. Of the ruin that threatens us, thanks to one single man—one wretched, frantic man !

CHANCELLOR : Excellency ! Are you speaking of his Majesty the Czar ?

PAHLEN : And do you think one question can stifle an inevitable word or hinder an inevitable deed ? Yes, Chancellor, I am speaking of Paul the First, Catherine's miserable son, who found a dozen allies among the nations of Europe and has made a score of enemies ! France, England, Austria, Prussia, Spain—all the world has set upon us, thanks to him ! His tyranny has driven Russia herself from fear to resentment, from resentment to fury—to the secret, dangerous fury that we feel smothering every breath we seek to draw—do you deny it ? Yesterday this

emperor was only a clumsy fool, but to-day he is a pitiful madman who plays with men as a child plays with leaden soldiers, and to-morrow Russia may be nothing but his shattered box of toys !

CHANCELLOR : Excellency, why have you brought me here ? We both know these bitter truths. We have spoken of them already—but then we spoke as servants of our master, in his interest. I know you, I respect you, perhaps I like you more than you suppose ; but by what right do you use such words to me—a rebel's words to the Imperial Chancellor ?

PAHLEN : By right of will, Nikita Petrovitch, by right of resolve, by right of necessity ! If my mind is now set upon one purpose, it is because I have eyes to see and shoulders broad enough to bear the consequences—because without my guidance Russia is a ship without a helmsman —because I am the only leader of a rebellion that God himself decrees and man demands !

CHANCELLOR : I knew this, and yet I came. I stand and listen to you ; I am your confederate. And you are a traitor !

PAHLEN (*with a faint smile*) : Will you not say—a lover of my country ?

CHANCELLOR (*troubled*) : I cannot be sure. Your secrets lie too deep for me.

PAHLEN : I need you with me, Chancellor, because all Russia knows you for an honest man. Your name spells justice for our cause—a virtue not to be despised. We must end the disastrous reign of Paul and set the Czarevitch Alexander

on the throne. You are this young prince's friend—perhaps his best friend. Your task will be to win him over to our cause. You know, as I know, that a new day will dawn for Russia when he is Czar. The Prince will not be unwilling, I think, but he may be difficult. Like yourself, he has a sensitive conscience. Also, he is fonder of you than of me. Therefore we must move cautiously, and beware how much we undertake without his knowledge.

CHANCELLOR : The Czar will resist to the uttermost. Are you prepared to answer for his life ?

PAHLEN (*slowly*) : I desire no bloodshed ; but no man can answer for another's life. If I promise you that our goal is the Czar's abdication and not his death, will you join us and attempt your task ?

CHANCELLOR (*in a low tone*) : I am with you, Pahlen.

PAHLEN : Why is your voice so sad ?

CHANCELLOR (*turning away*) : I see bloodshed in spite of all.

[PAHLEN *regards him gravely for a moment.*

PAHLEN : Now we must put aside our own feelings, Nikita Petrovitch. (*With a change of tone.*) I have undertaken the command of our confederacy, and I shall direct all its movements. The way is already prepared. You know that I have a following in the army, and especially in the garrison of Petersburg. I am sure of the support of several officers who have been insulted or mishandled by the Czar. In the next few days I shall win over the popular heroes of

Catherine's reign. Within a month the ring round the throne can be completely closed.

CHANCELLOR : Fearful measures, Pahlen ! Fearful measures ! What if Alexander should refuse to sanction them ? We are gambling terribly with the future.

PAHLEN : Perhaps the future is gambling with us—or with me ! If this young man should set his face against us, would he be brought to reason by necessity ?

CHANCELLOR : By necessity do you mean yourself ?

PAHLEN : I mean myself—and the avalanche of ruin that comes hurtling upon us all. The man who does not stand beside me stands in danger !

CHANCELLOR : Now I see the choice you offer me, Count Pahlen. I see there is no choice. I felt it from the moment when I came into this room. I yielded to you not from fear, but from necessity. You may count upon me none the less.

PAHLEN : Thank you, Chancellor ; I never doubted it.

CHANCELLOR (*with a fleeting smile*) : No, you never doubted it, Excellency ! If I could be as sure of myself ! If I could see the light of noon and not that blood-red dawn before my eyes ! I fear these winter nights will seem long to some of us. I am no cheerful confederate, as you see.

PAHLEN : And do I look so cheerful, Nikita Petrovitch ?

CHANCELLOR (*looking him in the face*) : By God, you do not ! But I have no pity for you, for you are able to stand alone. Farewell, Count !

PAHLEN : We have put all personal feelings behind us, Nikita Petrovitch. And so good night to you—my friend.

[*The* CHANCELLOR *goes out.* PAHLEN *remains alone for an instant. His repose seems to drop from him like a mask.*

Men like that are none too easy, none too easy ! And yet God save us from professional traitors ! (*He seats himself and rings.*)

[*The* FOOTMAN *enters.*

FOOTMAN : Excellency !

PAHLEN : An orderly is to go at once to General Talysin, with the message that our meeting to-night will be at his house, instead of here. He is to notify Admiral Ribas to the same effect. A sleigh is to be ready for me at ten minutes to eleven.

FOOTMAN : Very well, Excellency !

PAHLEN : Stay. Was our lady visitor inquisitive ?

FOOTMAN : Not at all, your Excellency. Her ladyship is reading at present.

PAHLEN : Is she—has she—— ?

FOOTMAN (*discreetly*) : Not yet, Excellency.

PAHLEN : You may tell her I am now alone.

[*The* FOOTMAN *goes out.*

If my politics are the devil, this woman is the deep sea. She knows me too well, for she sees me with my own eyes. And still I am a match for her, because I spell necessity. And if need be . . . (*He seems to shiver.*) Brr ! Our good Chancellor has left a chill behind him !

[ANNA *enters.*

ANNA : Alone, my friend ? Why did you not come to my room ?

PAHLEN : My day's work is not yet ended, Anna Petrovna. Now you must let me drive you home again.

ANNA : Are you going out—at this hour ?

PAHLEN : Why not ?

ANNA : You did not speak of it before.

PAHLEN : Anna, must we begin to cross each other again ? What devilment, or love of mischief, brought you here to-night ? I hope we may not both repent it.

ANNA : Let us hope not, but still I find you insufferable. Your day's work ! Do you really imagine I am playing the jealous wife ? Oh, I can well believe you have no time for women in these days !

PAHLEN (*gravely*) : Anna, you and I must come to an understanding. Can you afford to risk the breaking of the bond between us—call it love or what you will ? And if you are willing to betray me, who is ready to pay you your price ?

ANNA : That is a very foolish insult. I find you much less discreet than usual this evening.

PAHLEN (*looking at her steadily*) : Go on, Anna, if you please.

ANNA : You say that we must come to an understanding. You always say that when you have reason to fear me—or your conscience. I know you like to think there is nothing but a physical bond between us, but there you are wrong. You have betrayed me with other women,

these ten years past, and I—well, you declare that I am as unfaithful. And still we return to each other. Why, Peter, why? Because I sometimes feel the need for you—and because you cannot forget that ten years ago you found occasion to send Baron Ostermann to a soldier's death. Is not that the real bond between us? You reward me with the not too delicate attachment that I require; and I reward you with the malicious devotion that satisfies your pride. We are both unscrupulous, and we know it well.

PAHLEN (*after a silence*): You are dangerous because you have the courage of your thoughts, Anna—because you seek the truth, however dark it may appear. But what if I took a leaf from your book of malice? What if I were unscrupulous enough to rid myself of you?

ANNA: I should defend myself with every weapon, Peter. I should drag you down, and then I would gladly begin to climb again with you, step by step, if our limbs were still unbroken. (*She approaches him.*) Peter, Piotr, perhaps I am on my guard against you already. (*She kisses him.*)

PAHLEN: Remember, Anna, there is no hope of worming your way into my secrets. Affairs of State for me, affairs of the heart for you; is that agreed?

ANNA: We shall see.

[*The* FOOTMAN *re-enters.*

PAHLEN: Is all in order, Ivan?

FOOTMAN: Yes, Excellency!

PAHLEN : Then let us go, Baroness.

ANNA (*as they move towards the door*) : But tell me, my dear friend, why did our gentle Chancellor call upon you in that black coat? So *very* unofficial, was it not?

[PAHLEN *halts and looks at her.*

I caught a glimpse of him as I went up the stairs. Is he in mourning?

PAHLEN (*between his teeth*) : Yes, Baroness. I think he is in mourning.

[*They go out together.*

CURTAIN

SCENE II

An ante-chamber in the Old Michael Palace, in the forenoon.

The ADJUTANT *and the* CHAMBERLAIN *are in conversation together ; a little apart stands a* STAFF CAPTAIN. *To right and left of the doorway, as sentries, stand* STEPAN *and another guardsman.*

ADJUTANT : He is in one of his maddest fits to-day. He wants to flog the footmen, and talks again of sending sixty thousand men against Berlin.

CHAMBERLAIN (*with a nervous laugh*) : My dear Adjutant, we ought to smile as we watch ourselves dancing to the tune he whistles. There is no need to take our falls too seriously, for the entertainment will soon be over. I think you understand me ?

ADJUTANT (*pacing the room*) : I would jump at any way of escape from this madhouse—even if it meant some filthy Siberian regiment of the line. But you are right ; we have only to set our teeth and hold out a little longer. It cannot last.

CHAMBERLAIN : I tell you, Pahlen is the cleverest devil who ever played a hand with Fate for Holy Russia. His web is spun closer and closer round the Czar—and still the fool sees nothing, because he can still kick and pummel as he pleases.

ADJUTANT : I know, I know. But one needs nerves of iron to look on at such a sight.

CHAMBERLAIN : Or else a sense of humour, my dear adjutant—our poor civilian substitute for

your nerves of iron. Just think of them in there at this moment—Pahlen seated beside him, accepting his orders with that cold, impassive face. Without a word he takes down some wildly insulting note to the Prussian Ambassador, while he writes in the margin his own cipher—meaning null and void ! And that in the Czar's presence—there's irony for you !

ADJUTANT : And still we wait and know nothing.

CHAMBERLAIN : We shall know nothing until the Czarevitch is won over.

ADJUTANT : Yes, the Czarevitch—Pahlen's next conquest, let us hope.

[*The shrill voice of the* CZAR *is heard.*

CHAMBERLAIN : Judging by his temper, it seems that our fair Lopuchin failed to give her usual satisfaction last night. . . .

[*The door is thrown open. All present become rigid as sculptured figures.*

The CZAR *stands in the doorway. His eyes, with their heavy, quivering lids, seem to look past all the persons in the ante-room. His face is bloated but pale ; his forehead high to the point of deformity, his nose turned up, his mouth sensual and crooked, his chin delicate and almost womanly. His brows twitch, and he continually jerks his right shoulder, which seems higher than his left. As he walks his glance seems to trail along the ground. He passes the motionless figure of the* STAFF CAPTAIN, *then suddenly turns upon him and kicks his toes apart with his heavy riding-boot.*

CZAR : Heels together, toes apart ! Angle of forty-five degrees—laid down by regulations !

Officer of the guard—ignorant of orders ! He shall learn them !

STAFF CAPTAIN : May it please your Majesty——

CZAR : Officer of the guard—speaking without orders ! Adjutant !

ADJUTANT (*three paces behind him*) : Sire ?

CZAR : Staff Captain here—seconded for service —Jeletzky Regiment—stationed in Mogileff !

ADJUTANT (*writing down the order*) : Very well, your Majesty.

[*In the doorway, which is still half open,* PAHLEN *appears. He takes in the scene with a cold, detached glance, raising his brows slightly. The* CZAR *appears to be seized with a new and sudden interest. He goes up to one of the two sentries, bends over him, and methodically counts the number of buttons on his long gaiters. Then he draws himself up again, examines the man's uniform, pigtail, and helmet, and passes on to the other sentry,* STEPAN. *He bends as before, counts again, and then suddenly springs up and strikes the man a blow on the jaw with his fist. The sentry remains motionless.* PAHLEN *approaches slowly.*

CZAR (*screaming*) : Adjutant ! Summon the guard ! That sentry in irons !

ADJUTANT (*calling from the doorway*) : Corporal of the guard !

[*The cry is echoed outside :* " Corporal of the guard ! " *The* CORPORAL *enters and salutes. The* ADJUTANT *says a word to him in a low tone, and he places the sentry under arrest. Meanwhile* PAHLEN *has carefully inspected the prisoner's legs. He turns to the* CZAR.

PAHLEN : Sire, if I may venture to speak, the man is wearing the sixteen buttons ordered by your Majesty.

CZAR (*to the* CORPORAL, *who is about to march* STEPAN *away*) : Corporal—lift that man's leg ! Lift—d'ye hear me ?

[*The* CORPORAL *lifts up* STEPAN'S *leg. The* CZAR *counts once again, touching each separate button with his forefinger. Then he looks at* PAHLEN *with a dangerous smile.*

Hands off, Corporal !

[*The* CORPORAL *removes his hands, and* STEPAN, *trembling with fear, sways on one leg.*

Leg up, man ! None of your totters !

[*He stands in front of* STEPAN, *whose face gradually begins to betray an expression of dull fury. Each time the leg threatens to sink the* CZAR *strikes it upward with his riding-whip.*

Leg up, I say ! Leg up !

[*He looks at* PAHLEN, *whose eyes are on the other sentry.*

Leg up, fellow !

[*The leg sinks lower and lower. The blows of the riding-whip are redoubled.* STEPAN, *with a dull thud, sets his foot upon the floor.*

Leg up—do you hear ?

[STEPAN *does not move. The* CZAR *turns to* PAHLEN.

Governor Pahlen, you are witness—charge of mutiny. Disobedience—Emperor's orders ! Any comment ?

PAHLEN (*coldly*) : No, your Majesty.

CZAR : Adjutant forward ! Sentry in irons ! Close arrest ! Sixty lashes ! (*To* PAHLEN) Now, Pahlen—any comment ?

PAHLEN : None, your Majesty.

CZAR : So much the better ! I am in spirits—capital spirits ! They shall sweat for me—down below there ! Adjutant, forward ! Guard paraded ?

ADJUTANT : The company is on parade, your Majesty.

CZAR (*striding to the doorway*) : My sergeant's cane ! Emperor in person—giving all commands ! Officers in the ranks—officers in the ranks ! Fall in there—fall in !

[*Exit the* CZAR.

PAHLEN (*to the* ADJUTANT) : Dismiss that corporal !

[*The* ADJUTANT *says a word to the* CORPORAL, *who turns about and goes.* PAHLEN *addresses* STEPAN *gently.*

Go back to your post, my son.

[STEPAN *takes post again by the doorway. From the courtyard is heard the strident voice of the* CZAR, *with his* " One—two," *and the sharp blows of his stick upon the pavement.* PAHLEN *closes the window with an expression of disgust. The* ADJUTANT *speaks in low tones with the* CHAMBERLAIN, *while* PAHLEN *turns to the* STAFF CAPTAIN.

PAHLEN : Captain, one word with you. . . .

STAFF CAPTAIN (*joining him with alacrity*) : Excellency ?

PAHLEN : Did you deserve that punishment, Captain ?

STAFF CAPTAIN (*after an astonished pause*) : No, Excellency, I swear it ! Even if you expect me to say Yes, I cannot.

PAHLEN : I expected you to say No, Captain. I say No myself. (*Taking his hand*) Do we understand each other, Captain ? Can I rely on you, as you on me ?

STAFF CAPTAIN : You can, so help me God !

PAHLEN : Very well, your transfer is suspended. Go to the Preobrashensky Barracks and report yourself to the commander of the guard for special duties. It will not be long before we meet again, Captain. Good morning to you.

STAFF CAPTAIN : I can be grateful, Excellency. You will see that.

[*He bows deeply and goes out.*

ADJUTANT (*to the* CHAMBERLAIN) : There goes another of them !

CHAMBERLAIN : Yes, one more. He has only to walk behind Paul and pick up the wounded. . . .

[*They go on speaking in low tones. Meanwhile* PAHLEN *has been watching* STEPAN.

PAHLEN : Come to me, grenadier. (STEPAN *obeys.*) What is your name ?

STEPAN : Stepan Warulenko, Excellency.

PAHLEN : Listen, Stepan. What did you think to yourself when I showed the all-powerful Czar that he was in the wrong about your uniform ?

STEPAN : I thought to myself your Excellency meant well, but——

PAHLEN : Well ?

STEPAN : But it would—it would do me no good.

PAHLEN : So you know our all-powerful Czar as well as that, Stepan ? (*The other is silent.*) And what did you think of me when I agreed you were guilty of mutiny ?

STEPAN (*with hesitation*) : Maybe your Excellency could hardly do otherwise. . . .

PAHLEN : I am asking what you thought of me, Stepan ! You may speak your mind. I am not the Czar.

STEPAN (*blurting out*) : I thought it was—unworthy of your Excellency—not to speak the truth. Yes, that was what I thought !

PAHLEN : The Czar did not speak the truth either, Stepan.

STEPAN (*stubbornly*) : The Czar—the Czar is—— !

PAHLEN : What is the Czar, Stepan ? You may speak. Your eyes have said it already, and they did not anger me, Stepan ! You have only to say it once again !

STEPAN (*panting*) : The Czar is—— (*He breaks out.*) Governor, master, why do you torment me so ? We soldiers have enough to bear already ! What if it should cost me my head ? (*Trembling.*) No offence, honoured Excellency, no offence, but what do you want from me ?

PAHLEN : I want honesty, Stepan. If you tell me what the Czar is, you shall escape your jail and your flogging. (*In his ear.*) I am looking for brave men, honest men, Stepan.

STEPAN (*opening wide his eyes*) : The Czar is a devil !

PAHLEN (*close to him*) : And you have been taught to hate the devil, have you not ?

STEPAN : Yes . . . yes. . . .

PAHLEN : You are to hate him as I do, Stepan As I hate him !

STEPAN (*with simple faith*) : Little Father, I obey you. I belong to you ; do with me what you will !

PAHLEN : It is well, Stepan ! Now go to your post.

[STEPAN *obeys*. PAHLEN *joins the* ADJUTANT *and* CHAMBERLAIN, *to whom he speaks*.

That lad has a trustworthy anger in his eyes, Adjutant. We shall find him useful. I shall make him my orderly. Will you be able to smuggle him from the guard-room to my house ?

ADJUTANT : That should be easy, your Excellency.

PAHLEN : Very good. And, remember, I am to be instantly informed of all his Majesty's personal orders, such as punishments, promotions, and the like. You know how important that is—to all of us.

ADJUTANT : I understand, Excellency.

PAHLEN (*turning to the* CHAMBERLAIN) : Now tell me, Baron, is our fair Lopuchin always with the Czar these nights ?

CHAMBERLAIN : Always, Excellency. It would be well if he saw less of her. Through her he slips from our control.

PAHLEN : They tell me the Empress is extremely incensed by this woman's shameless behaviour ?

CHAMBERLAIN : It is the more painful to her Majesty, because her Majesty's bed-chamber is next the Czar's.

PAHLEN : There is a door between them, is there not ?

CHAMBERLAIN : A door which is never opened.

PAHLEN : And has the Czar spoken lately of walling up that door ?

CHAMBERLAIN : Not that I remember, Excellency.

PAHLEN : You will remind him of it when occasion serves. The matter may not be so trifling as it seems.

CHAMBERLAIN (*as if recoiling from a thought*) : Let us hope——

PAHLEN : Yes, Baron, let us hope by all means ; but we must foresee every possibility, however grave. They tell me, Baron, you have the reputation of a wit.

CHAMBERLAIN : Your Excellency honours me.

PAHLEN : I have a taste for irony myself, Baron. But if your sense of humour is stronger than your nerves, then you should go no farther with us. You need fear no reproaches, for I should understand. I should even understand it if your conscience—or your sense of humour—obliged you to whisper a word against me to the Czar.

CHAMBERLAIN (*staggered*) : I hope your Excellency does not imagine——

PAHLEN (*interrupting him*) : Let us be quite clear,

Baron. I should not object to a downright denunciation, if the moment were well chosen ; for then I could work better and more speedily.

CHAMBERLAIN (*very gravely*) : Excellency, I have promised you my support, and I am a man of my word.

PAHLEN : Quite so, Baron, quite so. (*Regarding him closely, with a smile.*) I see that you are not the person I shall choose to denounce me. There, there, Baron ; you are a man of your word, and we are friends again. (*He turns to the other.*) One more question to you, Adjutant. Do you notice any change in the Czarevitch these days ?

ADJUTANT : Yes, Excellency, it is plain that he is suffering—all too plain !

PAHLEN : And in our friend the Chancellor ?

ADJUTANT : His face betrays him too. I fear the Chancellor is a poor liar.

PAHLEN : Very poor, God knows—and on our side that virtue is a fault. (*Bitterly.*) He and I go ill together, for I am a capital liar—or do you wish to contradict me, gentlemen ? (*Both are silent.*) There, I take no offence, for I sometimes loathe the trade, like yourselves, no doubt. (*He points to* STEPAN.) Send the lad round to me before the Czar returns. I have taken a fancy to him ; one catches a whiff of brimstone now and then. *Au revoir, Messieurs,* and many thanks to you.

[*He goes out.*

CURTAIN

SCENE III

BARONESS OSTERMANN'S *boudoir, separated by curtains from her bedroom in the background. Over the back of a couch hangs the tunic of* PAHLEN'S *uniform, discarded overnight. It is early morning.*

ANNA, *in a dressing-gown, slips softly through the curtains, looking back as if to make sure no one is watching her. She half opens the shutters of a window, and puts out the candle she is carrying. Then she goes quickly to the uniform, feels the pockets of the tunic, and takes from one of them a document, which she studies carefully.*

Meanwhile, PAHLEN, *also in a dressing-gown, has appeared between the curtains, where he stands watching her.* ANNA *finishes reading the document, and is about to replace it when she turns and sees him. She smiles strangely, half-defiantly, as he comes forward.*

PAHLEN : This throws a new light upon your character, Baroness. Have I given you leave to search my pockets ?

ANNA (*lightly*) : Oh, you do not know how long I have lain awake—or how tiresome I found your snores, Peter ! Perhaps I was foolish, but I was looking for love-letters to amuse myself.

PAHLEN : That is not true, Baroness. You were listening last night when I told the Chancellor's secretary I would bring him a certain document this morning. Before we retired, you made sure that I was carrying papers on me. You even discovered in which pocket they lay.

ANNA : Do you imagine that I take you seriously ?

PAHLEN : You cannot take that paper seriously enough. Now give it me.

[*She obeys calmly, but her smile is now glassy.*

ANNA : Suppose I admit that I was curious ? Is there any harm in that ? You know what they are whispering at Court, and what strange tales are appearing in the foreign papers. They say you are the only man who knows the truth. I have said so all along, for you know what you want.

PAHLEN : Yes, Baroness, I know precisely what I want. I knew it when I took leave of the Chancellor's secretary in your presence, and when I brought that paper with me to your rooms. Perhaps I have been awake longer than you, Anna.

ANNA : Do you mean that you put that paper into my hands for some motive of your own ?

PAHLEN : I did not put it there, Anna. Your hands were indiscreet and clumsy. I provided for a contingency, that was all. I have warned you already not to try your wits against me in affairs of State.

ANNA (*uncertainly*) : My dear Peter, who says that I want to try my wits against you ?

PAHLEN : You said that you were on your guard against me. Well, now you may have good reason to defend yourself. We have come to such a pass that I mean to be rid of you once for all.

ANNA (*vehemently*) : Take care, Pahlen. I may still be a match for you, if it comes to that. That paper in your hand betrays your conspiracy against the Czar !

PAHLEN : *My* conspiracy ? Come, Anna, come, you are clever enough to know that if I were guilty I should never have carried the proofs about with me. And I should be dealing very differently with you now.

ANNA : Then let us say no more about it, Peter. I promise not to meddle again with your affairs. Be good to me, Piotr, and let us say no more !

[*She attempts a movement of tenderness, but* PAHLEN *remains grave and cold.*

PAHLEN : No, Anna, we cannot leave it there. You have forced your way into a circle that has closed about you. What you have learned you cannot forget ; and I must reckon with your knowledge. Unfortunately I must reckon with it.

ANNA : Peter, must you make me unhappy ?

PAHLEN : Understand me. Your lover is one person, but Governor Pahlen is another.

ANNA : And what punishment is Governor Pahlen pleased to decree ?

PAHLEN : From your tone it is plain you do not understand me yet. Listen, Anna. You have become involved in a conspiracy.

ANNA (*crying out*) : You devil ! You devil ! That is false !

PAHLEN : A secret document has come into your hands. I am therefore obliged to secure your silence. (ANNA *makes a movement as if to escape.*) Pray be reasonable, Anna, in your own interest. I secure your silence in the way that is least painful to you.

ANNA : And that is—— ?

PAHLEN : That is, by making you one of the conspirators.

ANNA : I—one of the—what do you mean? (*With a nervous laugh.*) Come, Pahlen, why these elaborate precautions? Have you and I never kept secrets from the world before?

PAHLEN (*coldly*) : I see you are ready to play your part, Baroness. Let us hope it will come up to your expectations.

[*He begins dressing.*

ANNA : And when does my scene begin, if you please?

PAHLEN : It begins here and now. You will oblige me first of all by taking a sheet of writing-paper with your monogram upon it—yes, so. And now you will write me the most affectionate letter you can manage to compose. A few lines will do ; let us not strain your imagination too far.

ANNA : Your piece begins like a comedy, it seems.

PAHLEN : You will oblige me by losing no time.

ANNA (*taking pen and paper*) : I am all nerves, as you can imagine. I never wrote a love-letter to order before. You shall dictate to me.

PAHLEN : Very well. Write : " *Mon chéri*, how I long for you, though only two hours ago you were by my side. I feel your arms about me still, those arms that crush me into nothingness . . ."

ANNA (*looking up*) : Is it necessary to be quite so intimate?

PAHLEN : I am dictating what is necessary, if you please. Write : " This evening, alas, we cannot meet, for I have a rendezvous of long standing. And to-morrow night I must positively keep free for my little Sasha . . ."

ANNA (*throwing down her pen*) : I know nobody called Sasha !

PAHLEN : Nor I. He is of no importance—merely one of your lovers. Write : " for my little Sasha, who will otherwise be quite rabid. You know, he has such ravishing teeth . . ." Or ravishing eyes, or ravishing legs, just as you please.

ANNA : Is this some malicious joke of yours, Pahlen ?

PAHLEN : Not at all. But stay, teeth are perhaps vulgar. Write lips instead. (*Dictating again.*) " He has such ravishing lips. We are not jealous, are we, my dear Peter ? We can enjoy the small delights of this world. *Toujours la tienne*, Annuschka." That will do.

ANNA (*finishing her task*) : Now Piotr, do you mean that as a lesson to me ? Are you really jealous ?

PAHLEN : We will soon banish that fear, my dear Baroness. Give me the letter.

[*He has now finished dressing.* ANNA *gives him the letter, which he reads carefully, repeating the words* " Toujours la tienne " *with a smile of approval. He then places it in the cuff of his tunic so that an edge of the paper is plainly seen.*

There, Anna, many thanks. Now you have done me one favour.

ANNA (*with sudden fear*) : Is one not enough for to-day ?

PAHLEN : Unfortunately not, Baroness. That was only the opening scene ; the complications are yet to come. Now you will kindly take a sheet of paper without your monogram—any scrap will do—and write on it the words : " Sire, beware of Pahlen and the Chancellor ! " Nothing else ; no name, no signature. Why do you hesitate ?

ANNA (*staring before her*) : What if I refuse ?

PAHLEN : Then I shall have you arrested as a suspect and brought up for trial before the secret court.

ANNA (*in terror*) : No, Pahlen, no, Peter, you would never do that !

PAHLEN : You are wrong, my dear lady, dangerously wrong, if you suppose I shall hesitate for one instant. I think you know the weapons of the Emperor's secret court. Now will you write ?

ANNA : Pahlen. . . . Oh, Pahlen. . . . I am afraid !

PAHLEN : If you force me to take the pen from your hand, then I shall write myself. I shall write only the words " Baroness Anna Petrovna Ostermann, Imperial lady-in-waiting," and after the name a certain cipher, and below " Pahlen "—nothing more. And it will then be too late for you to flee from Petersburg. Are you writing yet ?

He bends over her writing-table and reaches slowly for the pen.

ANNA (*sobbing*) : I am . . . writing. . . .

PAHLEN : "Sire, beware of Pahlen and the Chancellor." (*Looking over her shoulder.*) No, Anna, that is an assumed hand. Of course I must have your own writing.

[*He takes the sheet and tears it up. She turns to him with a face convulsed by fear.*

ANNA : You devil, you devil, are you making me sign my own death-warrant ?

PAHLEN (*gentle and smiling*) : Oh no, my dear Anna. On the contrary, your fortune is as good as made. You will become the Czar's mistress, and perhaps a countess in your own right.

ANNA : Are you mad ? (*She springs up suddenly, as if overjoyed*) No, no, I see it now ! It was all a joke of yours from the beginning—and not such a bad one, I must say ! (*Laughing shrilly*) Come, Piotr, admit it now !

PAHLEN (*cold and impatient*) : This is no joke, and I am not mad. I am staking your future for my own ends ; and if the gamble succeeds I shall rule the Czar by night as well as by day. Now have I made myself plain ?

ANNA (*slowly*) : You are such a devilish rogue, Piotr, that I am almost proud to be your accomplice. Not that I have any choice. . . . (*She seats herself and writes.*)

PAHLEN : You are a good judge of roguery, Anna. (*He takes the letter.*) Thank you. Now address it : "To His Majesty the Czar." Good. We will seal it with a rouble. Do I see your hands trembling ? That will pass away. You have a whole day in which to make yourself

look beautiful—as only you know how. At the moment your complexion is a trifle off colour ; but that can be put right. Why do you stare at me so ? You see I am in good spirits—though I must miss my usual cup of your delicious chocolate and take my leave at once. The Czar's hour of rising is uncertain, and your well-meant line of warning must lie early on his table. So good morning to you, Baroness. Good morning—Anna.

[*He takes the letter, kisses* ANNA'S *hand and goes out. For a moment she remains motionless, then she runs to the door.*

ANNA : Pahlen ! Pahlen !

[*He is gone. She returns to the room.*

God in Heaven ! what have I done ?

[*She stares before her, and her face hardens.*

CURTAIN

SCENE IV

The CZAR'S *audience-chamber. Morning sunlight. The* ADJUTANT *and the* CHAMBERLAIN *enter together.*

CHAMBERLAIN : He has been here already—our volcano with the stony crust.

ADJUTANT : Whom do you mean ?

CHAMBERLAIN : Pahlen, of course. Fresh from the arms of his Baroness—is fresh the word ? Pale—dangerously pale. Mark this day, Adjutant.

ADJUTANT : What is happening ?

CHAMBERLAIN : Pahlen was here at eight o'clock this morning—an unheard-of hour in any properly conducted palace. He handed me the sealed letter that lies there on the Czar's desk. It seems this letter may provoke a scene ; in that case we are simply to shrug our shoulders and say we could not help it.

ADJUTANT (*going cautiously to the desk*) : Another of Pahlen's mystifications ! Personally I prefer an honest bomb.

CHAMBERLAIN : Speaking with some experience of bombs—as a court official of long standing—I feel this letter is more certain to go off.

ADJUTANT (*bending over the desk and reading*) : "To His Majesty the Czar." A woman's hand ! Are you sure Pahlen came from the Baroness ?

CHAMBERLAIN (*smiling*) : I can give a shrewd guess. Now I advise you to steer clear of that desk, Adjutant. The Czar is due, and we have another surprise waiting for him.

ADJUTANT : You mean Prince Alexander ? Yes, I passed him in the ante-room, and I was quite shocked by the expression of his face ; so haggard he looked, so careworn and conscience-stricken.

CHAMBERLAIN : Bah, that is nothing but fear ! Our young prince is a true Czar—which is to say a false romantic. A weak enemy, a doubtful ally, a dangerous friend. A generous nature, no doubt—but generous enough to see both sides of every case. Our cause depends on him and Pahlen together. Well, they say necessity makes strange bedfellows.

ADJUTANT : Hush !

[*They stand motionless on either side of the door as the* CZAR *comes clanking in. He passes them at first without notice, muttering and smiling to himself as though not ill-disposed this morning. He halts in the middle of the room, deep in thought ; then suddenly he turns upon the pair.*

CZAR : How—what ? You there—hum ! Have I told you ? Not yet, Adjutant ? Very good, then. Palace guard—standing orders. Guard will turn out—full salute—entire company—every evening—Countess Lopuchin—on arrival. Same salute—every morning—Countess Lopuchin—on departure. Understand me ?

ADJUTANT (*staggered*) : May I respectfully remind your Majesty that the full salute is a royal prerogative ?

CZAR : How—what ? Opposition ? Disobedience ?

[*The* CHAMBERLAIN *makes a sign to the* ADJUTANT.

ADJUTANT : Very well, your Majesty. The company of the guard shall be acquainted with your Majesty's gracious order.

CZAR : Excellent answer—Colonel Muravieff !

ADJUTANT : Pardon me, your Majesty, I hold the rank of Major.

CZAR : There, there—an excellent answer—'tis a fine morning—and the Countess's birthday—I am in spirits—you are promoted, Colonel Muravieff.

ADJUTANT (*perturbed*) : I trust your Majesty will not oblige me to resign my commission altogether.

CZAR : Oblige—resign ?

ADJUTANT : Such a promotion breaks the rule of seniority, and it has not been earned by any special service. I humbly beg that it be cancelled.

CZAR (*after an astonished pause*) : As you please—donkey ! (*He goes to the desk.*) Now to business. Who seeks audience ?

CHAMBERLAIN (*coming forward*) : Ahem ! His Imperial Highness the Czarevitch. His Excellency Count Pahlen, Governor of Petersburg and Foreign Minister. His Excellency the Chancellor and Minister for Home Affairs.

CZAR (*displeased*) : My son coming ? What does he want ?

CHAMBERLAIN : His Imperial Highness urgently requested a private audience of your Majesty, and he is now in waiting. I ventured to place his

audience first on the list of your Majesty's engagements.

[*A silence.*

CZAR (*looking at his desk*) : What is this letter ?

CHAMBERLAIN : What letter, sire ? (*He approaches.*) I cannot imagine. . . . It must have been put there without my knowledge.

CZAR : Adjutant—forward ! What do you know of this ?

ADJUTANT : Nothing, your Majesty.

CZAR : Hum ! (*He opens the envelope and reads the slip of paper. His face begins to work dangerously, and the* ADJUTANT *involuntarily retreats.*) Why do you run from me ? Bad conscience—hey ? How came this letter—on my table ?

ADJUTANT : I assure your Majesty I know nothing of it. It may be a petition that some footman has been bribed to convey directly to your Majesty's notice.

CZAR : Petition—blockhead ! (*He paces up and down, then pauses in front of the* CHAMBERLAIN.) Baron, you are a sly fox. I make you Marshal if you tell me——

[*He whispers in his ear.*

CHAMBERLAIN : Sire, Count Pahlen is so great a man that he seems to have no enemies and really has no friends.

CZAR : Great man—trash ! Trash ! What does that mean—great man ? I made him what he is—did I not—hey, did I not ?

CHAMBERLAIN : Of course, your Majesty. Your

Prime Minister and a great man must be one and the same.

CZAR : Bah, to the devil with you ! Clawbacks, spongers ! You are not fit to brush Pahlen's boots for him ! Nor even to stick to them—you leeches, you molluscs ! To the devil with you, I say !

[*They are about to withdraw.*

Halt, there—both of you ! About face ! Adjutant !

ADJUTANT : Your Majesty ?

CZAR : Forward—march ! (*Showing him the envelope*). D'ye know that handwriting—hey ?

ADJUTANT : No, your Majesty.

CZAR : On your word as an officer ?

ADJUTANT : On my word as an officer, sire.

CZAR : Chamberlain—forward—march !

[*The* CHAMBERLAIN *hurries forward.*

On your word as a nobleman, do you know that hand ?

CHAMBERLAIN : On my word of honour, sire, I do not.

CZAR (*as if to himself*) : They all torment me—all torment me ! Why can I never look—into their cursed minds ? (*He reflects for a moment.*) Now Alexander . . . (*raising his voice*) My son's aide-de-camp—was he in this room ?

ADJUTANT : No, your Majesty, I spoke with him outside.

CZAR : Was every entrance guarded ?

ADJUTANT (*after exchanging a glance with the*

Chamberlain) : Possibly not, sire. I was myself called away for a few moments. . . .

CZAR : Leave me—both of you ! Send me my son !

CHAMBERLAIN : Yes, your Majesty.

CZAR : When Pahlen comes—admit him instantly !

ADJUTANT : Yes, your Majesty.

CZAR : Be off !

The ADJUTANT *and* CHAMBERLAIN *go out. The* CZAR *alone moves restlessly about the room, muttering and gesticulating to himself. Then he sits down and taps nervously on his desk. A* FOOTMAN *announces the* CZAREVITCH.

FOOTMAN : His Imperial Highness the Prince Alexander, heir to the throne.

[ALEXANDER *enters and bows low.*

CZAR : What d'ye want? You are looking at me strangely. Are you ill—hey ?

ALEXANDER : No, sire, I am not ill.

CZAR : What, then ? What do you want with me ? No audience here without due warning —you know that ! Remember—this is an exception ! Another time—out you go—bag and baggage !

ALEXANDER : I ask pardon, sire. I felt a need to speak with you—I cannot tell why—it hung upon me like a millstone that no one but you could remove.

CZAR : Millstone—trash ! I am busy—no time for riddles—or for sentiment ! No claptrap here !

None of your snivelling ! There is no love lost between us—we know that ! I never asked you to be a good son.

ALEXANDER : Then what do you ask of me ?

CZAR : Obedience—that's enough ! Obedience —as from every loyal subject ! Understand me —hey ? Keep your sentiments—and welcome ! My orders apply to you—and my punishments —you know that !

ALEXANDER : Yes, sire, I know that.

CZAR : Then behave accordingly ! It may not be easy—heir to the throne—in good odour with the people. Popularity—jingles in your pockets. You think it easy money—hey ? But I warn you —that coin rings false ! Your Czar is a hard Czar—and a bloody Czar. Yes—and a mistrustful Czar. Not one jot of his authority—will he resign ! Some think him crazy—and he laughs at them—laughs in their faces ! It suits him—understand me—when they think him dangerous—keeps the busybodies at arm's length ! Now d'ye still come whining—begging me to lift your millstones ? Hey ?

ALEXANDER : I am anxious regarding the position of our country, sire.

CZAR : Oh, indeed—you are anxious !

ALEXANDER (*troubled*) : And it is my duty as heir to the throne to tell you of this anxiety——

CZAR (*sharply*) : Have you learned nothing ? As heir to the throne you have one duty—not to thrust yourself forward ! Fear God if you please—and keep from my sight !

ALEXANDER : Sire, I have terrible forebodings !

[*The* CZAR *rises and comes over to him.*

CZAR : Alexander—you are a fool ! And a bungler too ! You shoot at Pahlen with a cannon—and wonder that you miss him !

ALEXANDER : Pahlen, sire ? You perplex me . . .

CZAR : Oho, I perplex you ! Where is the mystery—hey ? You find fault with my policy. That means you find fault with my Prime Minister—hey ?

ALEXANDER : By no means, sire. Count Pahlen only obeys your Majesty's commands.

CZAR : Worse and worse—it seems you are impudent ! You blame me—but not Pahlen—because you fear him ! Since you are here—and talk of millstones—you shall speak your mind ! (*Cunningly*) Tell me, now—what d'ye think of Pahlen—hey ?

ALEXANDER (*after hesitation*) : I have no reason to change the high esteem in which I have always held the Governor.

CZAR (*cunningly*) ; But what if I—had such a reason ? Then would you dare—to change your mind about him ? Hey ?

A silence. ALEXANDER *seems to struggle with himself while he looks steadily at the* CZAR, *seeking to read his thoughts.*

ALEXANDER : No, sire. And I should think it a misfortune for us all if his authority were weakened.

CZAR (*with a sudden outburst*) : How they torment me—all torment me ! Why must I—beware of Pahlen—and the Chancellor ?

ALEXANDER (*thunderstruck*) : God in Heaven, what are you saying? What have you been thinking of me, sire? I—I——

[*He breaks off as the door opens.* PAHLEN *enters and looks from one to the other.*

PAHLEN : Pardon me, sire. If I am in the way——

CZAR (*confused*) : Pahlen! No, no—you must remain! We have no secrets—you know that! The Czarevitch here—wished to discuss affairs of State.

PAHLEN (*to* ALEXANDER, *sharply*) : In that case, Highness, I must beg you to observe the usual etiquette.

ALEXANDER : But surely, Excellency, I may speak to my father in private, of matters that concern me closely?

PAHLEN : Highness, you know why I can forbid you to do so!

ALEXANDER (*recoiling*) : Excellency, what am I to understand by these words?

PAHLEN : As you know, his Majesty is unfortunately troubled by doubts of your loyalty. For that reason you should avoid all subjects that may lead to discord between you.

CZAR (*embarrassed*) : Ahem—yes, yes—I said as much to him—in other words. (*To* ALEXANDER) The Governor is right—perfectly right!

ALEXANDER (*mastering his emotion*) : Sire, your presence forbids me to speak my mind!

PAHLEN : You may be sure that I should also forbid it, Highness. Frankness may go too far!

I cannot allow you to injure your own interest. Much more is at stake than your peace of mind !

[*Under his steady gaze,* ALEXANDER *lowers his head.*

ALEXANDER : I know, alas, I know !

CZAR : What is that—hey ? What is at stake, Governor ?

PAHLEN : The unity of Russia and the authority of her ruler !

CZAR : Do you mean—yourself or me ?

PAHLEN : I mean your Majesty ! I did not expect that question, nor did I deserve it. If you asked it in consequence of anything said to you by his Highness, then I must consider what action to take.

CZAR (*coming to him*) : What are you dreaming of—Pahlen, Piotr ? Do you suppose I would allow—one word against you ? More than that —you wrong the Czarevitch ! He spoke of you —most respectfully. Alexander, am I not right ?

ALEXANDER (*with resignation*) : You are right, sire. With your permission I will now take my leave.

CZAR : No parting in anger—no ill-feeling—no suspicions—hey ?

[PAHLEN *and* ALEXANDER *look at each other.*

PAHLEN : Highness, perhaps you will have the goodness to remain in the palace for the next half-hour. There is one matter of which I must speak to you after my audience of his Majesty.

ALEXANDER : I shall be at your Excellency's disposal.

CZAR (*vehemently*) : But no entering the Empress's quarters—understand ? No family plots —no bickerings under this roof !

ALEXANDER (*in a low voice*) : I will remain in the ante-chamber.

[*He bows and goes out. A silence falls between* PAHLEN *and the* CZAR, *who sits crouching at the desk, fingering his anonymous message. He furtively watches* PAHLEN, *who has moved to a desk of his own in the background and busied himself with his papers.*

CZAR : Ahem ! Governor !

PAHLEN : Your Majesty ?

CZAR : Hum, hum—yes, indeed—you spoke sharply to him—rapped him well over the knuckles—hey, Pahlen ? (*There is no reply.*) I suppose now—you think him mischievous—ready to put a spoke in your wheel—hey, Pahlen, am I right ?

PAHLEN (*with deliberation*) : I think your Majesty's tone to me is very strange this morning. His Highness the Czarevitch is no enemy of mine.

CZAR : I mistrust him—the treacherous cub ! But why did he come whining for a father's sympathy ?

PAHLEN (*ironically*) : It seems he did not get it.

CZAR : No, indeed ! But you should watch him, Pahlen—you may have cause to fear him too !

PAHLEN : I understand that his Highness had not tried to influence you against me ?

CZAR : He knew I would not listen. But there

may be—other ways of going to work—darker ways, Pahlen.

PAHLEN : Not for the Prince ; you may take my word for that. (*He approaches the* CZAR.) Sire, I think some other reason prompts you to speak to me so strangely.

CZAR (*rising, much perturbed*) : Why, what reason, Piotr—what reason could I have ? They all torment me, Piotr ! I cannot drag—the truth from any of them ! (*Crying out.*) And you yourself—what sort of man are you ? Why can I not see into their cursed heads—or yours ?

[*He has stretched out his hand to grasp* PAHLEN's *arm, and it brushes past his coat-pocket. With sudden suspicion in his tone :*

What—what papers are those ?

PAHLEN (*coolly*) : Where, sire ?

CZAR (*tapping*) : Why, here—here in your breast-pocket !

PAHLEN (*with a shrug*) : Official documents—reports, garrison orders, memoranda—how should I know what is there ?

CZAR : I want to look at them !

PAHLEN (*unruffled*) : By all means, sire.

[*He unfastens his tunic and empties the contents of his breast-pockets on the table. The* CZAR *pounces on the papers, examines them carefully and then lets them drop on the floor.*

CZAR : Are those—all ?

PAHLEN : All, your Majesty.

CZAR : May I—feel your pockets ?

PAHLEN : Certainly, sire. But I would venture to ask, with all respect——

CZAR (*suddenly, pointing to the letter in the other's cuff*) : And what is that ?

PAHLEN (*in an embarrassed tone*) : Sire, that—that is a private letter.

CZAR : I want to read it !

PAHLEN : Sire, it is a letter from a lady.

CZAR : I want to read it !

PAHLEN : Sire, it is a most intimate letter, painfully compromising for the lady in question . . .

CZAR : What the devil is that to me ? I want the letter !

PAHLEN : I cannot admit your Majesty's right . . .

CZAR (*bellowing*) : I command you—give me that letter !

[PAHLEN *gives him the letter. The* CZAR *glances through it and throws it down with a disgusted grimace.*

CZAR (*coarsely*) : Your other pockets !

PAHLEN (*retreating a pace or two*) : This is too much ! Why do you insult me ? I am not accustomed to carry seditious papers in my breeches-pockets. I must give you warning, sire—do not go too far !

CZAR (*screaming*) : Your pockets ! All of them !

PAHLEN (*looking him full in the face, with deliberation*) : Sire, I resign my office !

[*The* CZAR *recoils in silence and confusion. His shoulders heave more and more quickly. Presently it is seen that he is weeping.*

CZAR : No . . . no . . . not that ! Little brother, you know I shall not be with you long. . . .

PAHLEN : Sire, I beg of you—tell me what has happened to move you so ! Why do you mistrust me ?

CZAR (*sobbing*) : Little brother, they say I am ill, do they not ? I shall not be with you very long. . . .

[PAHLEN *goes boldly up to the* CZAR'S *desk, and bends his head as though in search of something.*

PAHLEN (*firmly*) : Sire, at all costs I must know what infamous suspicion has fallen upon me ! What has caused your Majesty to treat me—the most faithful of your servants—in such a way ?

[*The* CZAR *starts up, then dives among his papers.*

CZAR : Here, Pahlen, here, read this ! Read it ! (*He hands him the anonymous note, and clutches at his arm as he reads.*) Piotr, Piotr, they are plotting against me !

[PAHLEN, *paying no heed to him, reads aloud the words :* " Beware of Pahlen and the Chancellor ! " *He then seems to examine the paper carefully, and finally laughs aloud.*

PAHLEN : Sire, that is capital, capital !

CZAR (*still clutching his arm and watching his face*) : What do you say ? What does it mean, Pahlen ?

[PAHLEN *in his outburst of merriment has shaken his arm free of the other's grip. He bends to pick up* ANNA'S *letter, which had previously been dropped by the* CZAR, *and compares it with the other.*

PAHLEN : It means. . . . Sire, forgive my immoderate laughter, but who could restrain himself ?

CZAR (*as if partly reassured by his gaiety, but still bewildered*) : What is it, Piotr, little brother? What does it mean?

PAHLEN (*still laughing*) : Sire, it means that the plot is exposed! You were right—it was against me, and me alone!

CZAR : Against—you?

PAHLEN : Sire, I must charge you with a crime that takes my breath away! You have robbed me shamefully.

CZAR : I have—robbed you?

PAHLEN : Yes, of the prettiest woman in the world. The most enchanting baggage!

CZAR (*still bewildered, but with a lascivious chuckle*) : What is that you say? Some pretty woman—I have robbed you of—are you crazy, Pahlen, hey?

PAHLEN : See for yourself, sire. Have the kindness to compare the handwriting of this anonymous note and my love-letter. . . .

CZAR (*interested*) : The same hand—not a doubt of it! Who can this Annuschka be? I have it—your Baroness Ostermann!

PAHLEN (*smiling*) : Right the first time, your Majesty! No other than my beloved, ravishing, faithless little friend Anna Petrovna!

CZAR : And this note? Is it some revenge of hers?

PAHLEN : A revenge? Why, it is a declaration!

CZAR : A declaration? What—to me—hey?

PAHLEN : The lady is ambitious. She knows she

is ten years younger than your Lopuchin, and has a prettier pair of legs and a livelier temperament. She is more tactful too. She will not betray you quite so openly with every hanger-on at Court. . . .

CZAR : What ! Does Lopuchin—betray me ?

PAHLEN : Not a doubt of it. The Chief of Police can present your Majesty with a considerable list of—shall we say brothers-in-law ?

CZAR : The devil he can !

PAHLEN : But that is dead and done with : let us look to the future. All my congratulations, sire ; I am not jealous and I will not grudge the minx her promotion. . . .

CZAR : A devilish pretty woman, your little Baroness—that is true ! Tell me, Pahlen—would she sup with me to-night—hey ?

PAHLEN : I will answer for her ! She put me off for some imaginary Sasha, as you see. And Sasha is the fairy prince she hopes for—and Sasha has ravishing lips—still better, he is the Czar ! And Annuschka has not only a pretty face, but a figure like a goddess, and the devil's own knack of love-making, as you will soon discover. . . .

[*He whispers in the other's ear.*

CZAR (*laughing softly*) : Hum ! Hum !

PAHLEN (*bustling him*) : And I shall be delighted to convey your Majesty's commands to her—you do not know what pleasure that will give me ! And to-morrow morning, sire, I prophesy that you will excuse yourself from all your morning audiences. . . . Oh, yes, that is quite certain. . . .

[*They burst into peals of laughter. Suddenly* PAHLEN *breaks off and looks grave. The* CZAR, as *though completely dependent on the other's mood, echoes him for an instant with empty laughter. Then he is silent, and finally he peers into* PAHLEN'S *face with a doubtful glance.*

CZAR : What is it, Piotr, what is it ?

PAHLEN : But why—why did she name the Chancellor of all men ?

CZAR (*repeating dully*) : Yes, why—why the Chancellor of all men ?

PAHLEN : His loyalty is above suspicion !

CZAR : Are you sure, Pahlen ?

PAHLEN : He is the one man at Court for whom I can vouch. The one man !

CZAR (*frowning*) : No, Pahlen—that will not do ! I can see—you suspect him !

PAHLEN (*with assumed indifference*) : Well, perhaps of late we have both noticed signs of nervous strain in the Chancellor . . . even of depression. . . . No doubt a holiday——

[*He breaks off and proceeds to gather up the papers on the floor. There is a moment's silence. The* CZAR *sounds a gong on his desk, and a* FOOTMAN *enters.*

CZAR : I will receive the Chancellor—as soon as he arrives.

FOOTMAN : His Excellency is already in waiting.

CZAR (*hastily*) : Then is he—with the Czarevitch ?

FOOTMAN : Yes, your Majesty.

CZAR : Show him in at once !

[*The* FOOTMAN *goes out.*

PAHLEN : Your son is friendly with the Chancellor.

CZAR : What of that ?

PAHLEN : There may be no danger. But your son is not friendly with you.

CZAR : Hum ! And he hates you—I can see that.

PAHLEN : He fears me, that is all. (*A silence.*) By the way, the Baroness is quite domesticated . . . and unpretending——

CZAR (*absently*) : Baroness—hey ? Just so, just so. . . .

PAHLEN : You might promote her Countess at some convenient moment. . . .

CZAR : Of course, of course. Time enough for that.

PAHLEN : It will be well to get rid of your Lopuchin as soon as possible . . . a letter of credit and a passport would meet the case. . . .

CZAR : I would rather the gaoler rid me of her ! But no matter—do with her as you please.

PAHLEN (*with an ironical smile*) : Your Majesty should learn generosity from me !

CZAR (*laughing*) : Not bad, not bad !

[*The* FOOTMAN *enters.*

FOOTMAN : His Excellency the Imperial Chancellor.

[*The* CZAR *deliberately turns his back and goes to window.* PAHLEN *seats himself at his own desk, where he appears preoccupied. The* CHANCELLOR *comes in, and is instantly aware of the feeling against him. He looks nervously towards* PAHLEN, *who nods to him curtly.*

CHANCELLOR : I humbly wish your Majesty good morning. Good morning, Excellency.

[*The* CZAR *is still motionless.*

PAHLEN : Good morning, Count.

[*The* CHANCELLOR *takes a document from his pocket and consults it with some embarrassment.*

CHANCELLOR : Sire, with regard to the proposed domestic reforms, I venture to-day to draw your Majesty's attention to some defects in the police administration. Before giving particular instances, I would mention to your Majesty the extreme severity of the law relating to the registration of foreigners. It appears desirable in the national interest——

CZAR (*turning about and screaming at him*) : National interest ! *I* represent the national interest ! Now will you dare to cackle of reforms ?

CHANCELLOR (*pale and confused*) : Your Majesty, pray give me leave——

[*He looks at* PAHLEN, *who is smiling. The* CZAR *comes over to him and glares in his face.*

CZAR : Yes, Count, you shall have leave ! You shall have leave—to retire to your estate ! I think you need a rest ! I am very gracious to you, Count !

CHANCELLOR (*in a low tone*) : I am sensible of it, your Majesty.

CZAR (*to* PAHLEN) : Well, Pahlen, I must have exercise—so must my troops. Further business —this afternoon !

PAHLEN : Very well, your Majesty.

CZAR (*going out*) : My sergeant's cane ! Company of the guard ! Company of the guard !

[PAHLEN *approaches the* CHANCELLOR.

PAHLEN : Listen, Count. It was my doing. I advised the Czar to take that course.

CHANCELLOR (*simply*) : And I am grateful to you, Count Pahlen. I had come to a point where I could bear it no longer.

PAHLEN : That I could see. You have done what lay in your power, and it has been much. I thank you, Chancellor—though you cannot go all the way with us. (*In a lower tone*) We are all rogues together now—and yet the parting from you hurts me, Nikita Petrovitch. That may be one good sign.

CHANCELLOR (*in astonishment*) : But, Pahlen——

PAHLEN (*brushing him aside*) : Oh, you need not try to find a good word for me ; we have gone too far for that ! If you had stood in this room just now, and seen me badger and betray and cheat this poor sick creature—if you had heard me lie and lie and lie again to him, as I made ready to thrust him blindfold into darkness—if you could taste and smell the pool of filth in which I stand up to the neck, up to the very muzzle—— Great God, Nikita Petrovitch, what has this man done to me, what has he done to me, that I should hound him to his death ? (*With a change of tone.*) And yet you must not suppose that I am ready to turn back. No, Chancellor ; oh no, my friend ! The goal is still there, and I alone can be sure of reaching it ! I go forward, for I answer to no one but myself !

CHANCELLOR : Pahlen, you are uttering a

thought that came into my mind last night—a thought that took hold of me and would not let me go. There are two ways open to us : either to stifle conscience——

PAHLEN (*very gravely*) : Or to be stifled by it. Yes, Chancellor, there are two ways only, and each of us has chosen his own.

[ALEXANDER *comes in.* PAHLEN *goes to the door as if to close it behind him, makes a sign to some person outside, then closes the door and returns to them, standing a little apart.*

ALEXANDER : Chancellor, I have heard—I know of your dismissal. His Majesty did not fail to tell me—and he was none too gentle. Oh, my friend, my friend, he could do me no greater wrong than by driving you from me !

PAHLEN (*interposing*) : Highness, it is my duty to tell you what the Chancellor knows already. In dismissing him the Czar acted by my advice.

ALEXANDER (*staggered*) : By your advice ? Is that your gratitude to a follower—a comrade ?

PAHLEN : Prince, it is not our gratitude or ingratitude that matters now. It is Russia.

ALEXANDER : But what if the Chancellor's dismissal should decide me too to withdraw my support ? What if I should advise you—nay, command you, to give up your enterprise ?

PAHLEN (*gravely*) : Those are dangerous words, Highness ; very dangerous to yourself. You have done well to cloak them with an " if."

[ALEXANDER *is silenced.*

CHANCELLOR (*in a low tone*) : I know that nothing I can do will change the course of history. And you know it, Prince.

[ALEXANDER, *still silent, looks at him sadly.*

PAHLEN : And since to-day's events will make history, Highness, you must make your decision now.

ALEXANDER (*crying out*) : I cannot ! I dare not —yet !

PAHLEN : That has been your cry this month past. But meanwhile time runs on, and time has overtaken you. Now it is plain that time runs out. You know the ring has been closed, and the garrison stands ready. Count Valerian Suboff will enter my confederacy in the Chancellor's place.

ALEXANDER : Valerian Suboff !

PAHLEN : Yes, Highness. He too is waiting for the hour that I shall choose. When it strikes, are you ready to accept the vacant throne.

ALEXANDER (*recoiling*) : The vacant—throne ! Do you dare to speak those words in my father's own audience room ? Do you know to whom you speak them, Count Pahlen ?

PAHLEN (*sternly*) : The Governor of Petersburg speaks to the heir to the throne, who had audience of his Majesty this morning, but did not inform him of a plot against the Crown.

ALEXANDER : Pahlen ! What are you doing with me ?

PAHLEN : I am leaving you a free hand, Highness. You may go now to the Czar and tell him what you know. This is your last opportunity.

ALEXANDER (*yielding*) : My God, my God ! No —I will not !

PAHLEN : Then you decide for action ?

ALEXANDER : No, no ! Not yet ! (*Turning to the* CHANCELLOR.) Nikita Petrovitch—my friend—help me !

CHANCELLOR (*slowly*) : I must tell you that Pahlen is right !

ALEXANDER : You too ? You too ? I am alone. Will no one help me ? (*He runs to* PAHLEN *and clasps his hands.*) Pahlen, Pahlen, have pity on me !

PAHLEN (*suddenly gentle*) : My prince, how can my pity help you—or any other man's ? Do you renounce your title to the throne ?

ALEXANDER (*staring at him*) : Renounce ? Never, never !

CHANCELLOR : Highness, I am sorry now that you ever called me friend.

ALEXANDER (*sobbing*) : I am helpless. . . . I am friendless. . . .

[*The door is suddenly opened.*

ADJUTANT (*outside*) : He is coming !

[*The* CZAR'S *loud voice is heard. Then he enters, looking from one to the other.*

CZAR : Hey ? What have we here ? Hey ? Alexander——

PAHLEN : His Highness is weeping for your Chancellor, sire.

CZAR : Weeping ? The milksop ! Ha, ha ! Ha, ha !

[*He croaks with laughter.* PAHLEN *joins in.*

CURTAIN

SCENE V

SCENE : *A room in the Winter Palace, some weeks later. It is evening, and the curtains separating the chamber from an ante-room are partly drawn.* PAHLEN *enters with the* ADJUTANT *and* CHAMBERLAIN. *Behind them comes* STEPAN, *who now wears* PAHLEN'S *livery. He stands apart as they speak.*

PAHLEN : To-morrow is the twenty-third, is it not ?

ADJUTANT : Yes, Excellency.

PAHLEN : Then it is to-morrow that the Semionovsky Regiment mounts the Palace guard ?

ADJUTANT : Yes, Excellency.

[*A silence.*

PAHLEN : In the night of the twenty-third to the twenty-fourth of March.

ADJUTANT (*in a low tone*) : So soon !

PAHLEN : It is high time.

[*A silence.*

ADJUTANT : Does the Czarevitch know ?

PAHLEN : He knows nothing, because he counts for nothing. The Baroness is more important—and more dangerous, for she knows much and counts for much.

CHAMBERLAIN : Yes, it is her doing that the Czar goes from bad to worse.

PAHLEN : Too many things are her doing. Paul is crumbling away before our eyes.

ADJUTANT : Yes, it is terrible to watch !

CHAMBERLAIN : He drinks too much and eats

too little, for fear of poison. That English doctor has orders to stay with him day and night—even to guard the kitchens and taste his dishes for him.

ADJUTANT : Strange ; he hates England more than any country in the world, and yet he trusts an English cook and an English doctor !

CHAMBERLAIN : Perhaps the English are stupid enough to be trustworthy.

PAHLEN (*pursuing his own thoughts*) : And he dotes on Anna ; he clings to iife with her white arms. . . . He cannot do without her now. I could not foresee that when I gave her to him. The woman must go ! We must get rid of her—this very night.

ADJUTANT : To-night ! But how will that be possible ?

PAHLEN : Did you give her my message, Baron, asking for a word with her alone ?

CHAMBERLAIN : Yes, Excellency, and she agreed to see you before supper.

PAHLEN : Very well. I will bring her to reason if I can ; and if not, we must try another argument.

ADJUTANT (*uneasily*) : What argument ?

PAHLEN (*turning*) : Stepan !

They all look at STEPAN.

There is my argument, gentlemen. He is convincing, though perhaps vigorous.

ADJUTANT : Is not that the grenadier who had a difference with the Czar ?

PAHLEN : He is my best friend, and may be Russia's in the next few hours. (*A silence.*) And now for your task, Baron.

CHAMBERLAIN (*with a shiver*) : My task, Excellency ?

PAHLEN : You know every cupboard of the Palace. You will conceal my friend Stepan—that is my friend Stepan who stands there—in some convenient corner of the Baroness's rooms. And when my friend Stepan comes downstairs to my carriage, at eleven o'clock or thereabouts, carrying an unusual load on his back, he must meet no person but your two selves. Ah, now I see you understand me ! I shall presently have a chat with the Baroness—and you, Adjutant, will interrupt us and call me out on urgent business. Then I will give you further instructions. For the moment you may go, gentlemen. We three should not be seen too much together. Our Baroness has sharp eyes.

[*The* ADJUTANT *and the* CHAMBERLAIN *go out.* PAHLEN *remains with* STEPAN.

PAHLEN : Do you feel merry, Stepan ?

STEPAN : No, Excellency.

PAHLEN : Do you feel sad, Stepan ?

STEPAN : No, Excellency.

PAHLEN : Then what do you feel, Stepan ?

STEPAN : Nothing, Excellency.

PAHLEN : No fears ? No thumping of the heart ?

STEPAN : No, Excellency.

PAHLEN : Ah, happy man, blissful man ! But what if I am sad, Stepan ?

STEPAN : Then I am sad too, little father Excellency.

PAHLEN : Tell me, Stepan—you know the lady we have spoken of ?

STEPAN : I know her ladyship.

PAHLEN : Ladies are dainty toys ; ladies can be broken. But not with fists, do you hear ? Ladies have silken skins. An arm about the waist, a cushion on the lips . . . (*He whispers to him.*)

STEPAN : Very good, Excellency.

[ANNA *enters the room in the foreground.* PAHLEN *comes forward, drawing the curtains behind him, so that* STEPAN *is no longer seen.*

PAHLEN : Good evening to you, Baroness.

ANNA : Good evening, Count. The Chamberlain said you wished to see me.

PAHLEN : Yes, Baroness. I have to thank you for so kindly granting my request.

ANNA : Must you keep up this tone with me ?

PAHLEN : Gracious lady, we will be as distant or as intimate as you please.

ANNA : What do you want with me ? The Czar will soon be here.

PAHLEN : Where is he, then ?

ANNA : How should I know ?

PAHLEN : Who should know, if not you ?

ANNA : No doubt the English doctor is busy with him.

PAHLEN : His heart—ah, yes, his heart ! You will have to be more careful of that, gracious lady. The Czar is not blessed with your robust

constitution—or mine, for that matter. You must use him gently—and beware of his heart.

ANNA (*turning away*) : I prefer not to understand you, Count.

PAHLEN : My dear Anna, is this how you treat an old friend ?

ANNA : I never thought you could be so odious. Is that all you have to say to me ?

PAHLEN : No, I have a question for you. Is your task accomplished yet ?

ANNA : My task ?

PAHLEN : I brought you and Paul together for a special purpose. You were to ensure that the doorway to the Empress's apartments was walled up.

ANNA : Indeed ? This is a new tone of yours, Count. If it interests you so much, the door has been walled up. I forgot to mention it before.

PAHLEN : Ah, you forgot to mention it, but the thing is done ? Capital, capital ! Then I can free you from your bondage to a sick man—not the pleasantest of lovers, perhaps. Many thanks, Baroness ; I shall no longer require your services.

ANNA (*sharply*) : I do not care for your pleasantries, Governor ! Nor have I the honour to be subject to your orders. I shall remain with his Majesty whether you wish it or no—and whether I find it agreeable or no. The Czar is good to me. Perhaps he loves me ; it may be he needs me. You did not reckon with that ; but even your calculations may sometimes go astray !

PAHLEN (*laughing*) : So much the better, Madame Pompadour, so much the better, if that

is how we stand ! I shall know how to deal with you now. One question more—do you intend to denounce me to the Czar ?

ANNA (*after a silence*) : I think you are too wise a man to give me occasion for that.

PAHLEN : A clever answer, gracious lady ! But if I were foolish—yes, if I were foolish you would find your opportunity. Would that not be a little ungrateful ?

[ANNA *is silent.*

No matter, I give you full permission to say your worst. I will even let you remain with the Czar, on one condition. It is that from time to time you will remind his Majesty of your little warning to him : " Beware of Pahlen and the Chancellor." You see that I still have a use for you —even as my enemy.

ANNA (*crying out*) : Devilish, devilish ! Do you know what sort of man you are ?

PAHLEN (*gravely*) : No, Anna ; to tell the truth, I am not sure.

[*There is a knock at the door, and the* ADJUTANT *enters.*

ADJUTANT (*as if about to withdraw*) : Pardon me . . .

PAHLEN : Come in, Adjutant. Do you know what sort of man I am ?

ADJUTANT (*taken aback*) : No, Excellency.

PAHLEN (*with a smile*) : Nor I. But the Baroness here knows ; a devilish man ! Well, what is it ?

ADJUTANT : A messenger from the Admiralty for your Excellency. . . .

PAHLEN : I will come at once. (*To* ANNA) Baroness, you will make all my excuses to his Majesty if I should be a little late for supper. You should have no lack of subjects for conversation with him. *Au revoir, madame.*

[PAHLEN *and the* ADJUTANT *go out.* ANNA *paces the room restlessly, while footmen come and lay a table with three covers. The* ENGLISH DOCTOR *passes through the room, and* ANNA *stops him.*

ANNA : Tell me, doctor, have you seen the Czar ?

DOCTOR : Yes, madam.

ANNA : And examined him ?

DOCTOR : Yes, Madam.

ANNA : Well ?

DOCTOR : He ought not to drink so much, madam.

ANNA : Then is he really—ill ?

DOCTOR : Madam, you can see he is far from well.

ANNA : Tell me the truth, doctor !

DOCTOR : He is feverish, madam ; but that is not all.

ANNA : What else, doctor ?

DOCTOR : No more that can be said, madam. Now pray excuse me ; I must taste the dishes before supper.

ANNA : Tell me quickly—what ails the Czar ?

DOCTOR : He is—he is a creature to be pitied, madam.

[*He goes out. In the opposite doorway stands the* CZAR, *bloated as ever, but pale and feverish. His old staccato speech now breaks down frequently into rambling.*

CZAR : Who went out—just then ?

ANNA : The doctor.

CZAR : What does he say of me ?

ANNA : He is satisfied, sire.

CZAR : So my heart is sound—hey ?

ANNA : Yes, sire.

CZAR : And my lungs ?

ANNA : As good as ever, sire.

CZAR : Ah ! But my head ?

ANNA : Your head is well enough, the doctor says.

CZAR : No, my head is not well enough . . . not my head. . . . It knows too much, and that hurts, Anna. . . . And my eyes see nothing and my ears hear nothing, and yet I know, Anna. . . . My head splits with what I know !

ANNA : Sire, you must not excite yourself ! The doctor says that too.

CZAR : Must not, must not ? But I must, I must ! Shall I know what I know, and lie still to learn more ? Am I venomous, that they stamp upon me ? Am I rabid, that they kill me like a dog ? No, they hate me because I come of an accursed race ! My father was murdered, and maybe my son will be murdered, and my grandson . . . and all the Romanoffs will be murdered . . . and, last of all, Russia herself will die. . . . (*Clinging to* ANNA.) Do not leave me alone, Annuschka, my dove, my darling, my little wife, do not leave me alone ! They mean to kill me, Annuschka !

ANNA : Why do you not retire to Moscow, sire ?

CZAR : I refuse—to run away !

ANNA : Then do you not believe in—in what you know ?

CZAR (*uncertainly*) : I believe—I believe in Pahlen !

ANNA (*staring at him*) : You believe in Pahlen ? But it is he . . . sire, Pahlen is . . . he is . . . he . . . O God . . . he . . .

CZAR (*with sudden vehemence*) : Not a word against him, Anna, do you hear ? I forbid it !

ANNA (*shaken*) : I said nothing, sire ! I will obey you. . . .

CZAR (*tormented by a thought*) : Do you love Pahlen still ?

ANNA : *I*—love him ? No—no !

CZAR : I believe you love him still !

ANNA : It is false, sire !

CZAR (*as if whispering some crazy secret*) : But I love him, Anna, I love him !

ANNA : You !

CZAR : Yes, for it is written—love your enemies ! Ha, ha ! Ha, ha ! (*With sudden gravity.*) Where is Pahlen ? Why is he not here to sup with me ?

ANNA (*recoiling*) : Sire, do not look at me so !

CZAR : I think you know where he is to be found. . . .

ANNA : I have not seen him ! I swear I have not seen him !

[PAHLEN *steps through the curtains of the anteroom.*

PAHLEN : Sire, I warn you that the Baroness is lying. I was in this room with her until I was called away by an Admiralty messenger.

CZAR : Is that true, Anna ?

ANNA (*furious*) : If I lied to you, sire, I did no more than he does every day ! Yes, a hundred times a day ! I followed his example !

[ANNA *goes out.*

CZAR (*calling after her*) : Wait, Anna, wait ! (*To* PAHLEN) Run after her, Pahlen—bring her back to me !

PAHLEN (*motionless*) : She said that in lying she followed my example.

CZAR : Bah ! Nothing but spite ! Bring her back !

PAHLEN : She has known me ten years, sire. In that time I must often have lied.

CZAR : What has that to do with me ? I know you, I believe in you ; that is enough !

PAHLEN (*with a faint smile*) : That is enough for me, sire. All is well between us.

[*He is about to follow* ANNA *and bring her back. The* CZAR *watches him with extreme uneasiness.*

CZAR : Pahlen !

PAHLEN : Your Majesty ?

CZAR : Pahlen, come and sit by me. (*Screaming suddenly.*) Pahlen—I do not know you !

PAHLEN (*motionless*) : What is so strange in me, sire ?

CZAR (*regarding him closely*) : Oh, I am not crazy ! I still have my wits about me, Pahlen ! (*Sharply*) Were you in Petersburg when my poor father was deposed and murdered ?

PAHLEN : Sire——

CZAR : The truth !

PAHLEN (*coolly*) : I was in Petersburg, sire.

CZAR : Were you concerned in that—in that calamity ? The truth !

PAHLEN (*smiling*) : I was a young guardsman. What could I have to do with affairs of State ?

CZAR : Pahlen, you know your mind ; there lies your strength ! I believe you capable of everything—everything ! Do you hear me ?

PAHLEN (*in a hard tone*) : I will not thank you for the compliment, sire.

CZAR : You are brave too, Pahlen ! Dare you tell me to my face that my father's tragedy will be played again in Petersburg—this year and this month ? Dare you tell me a confederacy is already formed ? Or am I mistaken, Pahlen ?

PAHLEN (*with self-possession*) : Sire, you are not mistaken. There exists a confederacy, to which I myself belong. Its aim is. . . . (*He checks himself deliberately.*)

[*The* CZAR, *springing back, draws a pistol from his pocket.*

CZAR : So you are brave enough—for that ! I will reward you royally !

[*He takes aim at* PAHLEN, *who shuts his eyes and opens his arms in self-abandonment. The* CZAR *lets the weapon fall.*

Pahlen, you had—one more word to speak ! If you hold anything sacred in this world, then speak it now !

PAHLEN (*tauntingly, triumphantly*) : Its aim is to preserve your Majesty's life !

[*The* CZAR *breaks into a nervous titter, and his face relaxes.*

CZAR : So. . . . I almost . . . with my own hand . . . by one hair's breadth . . . if it be true. . . . But why not, why not ? Have I ever wronged you, Pahlen ?

[PAHLEN *steps back, as though the question were a blow.*

PAHLEN (*mechanically*) : Sire ?

CZAR (*crouching in his chair*) : Piotr, little brother, have I ever wronged you ?

PAHLEN (*with something like a groan*) : O God in heaven . . .

CZAR : Little brother, tell me, must I—must I kill myself ?

[*At these words,* PAHLEN *sinks slowly on to a chair and sobs. The* CZAR *springs up, as though awakening from stupefaction.*

Pahlen weeping—Pahlen ! Who in Russia would believe me if I told them that ? (*He struts about chuckling to himself.*) But what can be the matter ? Is it bad conscience, hey ?

PAHLEN : Sire, I am weeping out of pity for you !

CZAR : For me ?

PAHLEN : Yes, for what I tell you now must break your heart ! Sire, you must arrest the Czarevitch !

CZAR : Alexander !

PAHLEN : He is plotting against you !

CZAR (*bellowing*) : To the secret court with him ! Let him be shot to-morrow !

PAHLEN : Sire, that would be the signal for a

revolution ! The Prince is too popular, especi ally among the troops. You must be prudent for your own sake. Give me authority to confine him to the citadel. I will only use the power if necessity arises.

CZAR (*seeking to read the other's eyes*) : Yes, yes. When shall I sign the warrant ?

PAHLEN : Now. (*He takes a paper from his pocket.*) I have it ready for you.

CZAR : You have it ready ?

PAHLEN : Sire—your signature !

[*The* CZAR, *still looking him in the face, hesitates for an instant. Then he goes to his desk and signs.*

CZAR (*with a movement of weariness*) : Here is the warrant.

PAHLEN (*taking it*) : Now all is well.

CZAR : I am dog-tired, else I would leave to-night for Moscow—and take Annuschka with me. I am thirsty . . . thirsty . . .

[PAHLEN *brings him wine.*

I want to hear no more . . . of anything. . . . (*He drinks.*) Where is Annuschka ?

[PAHLEN *goes unobtrusively toward the curtain in the background.*

Go and fetch her to me, Piotr !

[PAHLEN, *with a sudden movement, draws the curtains apart.* ANNA *has no time to jump aside, and is revealed standing on the threshold of the ante-room.*

PAHLEN : You may come in now, Baroness. There is nothing more—to overhear !

[ANNA *comes forward almost unconcerned.*

CZAR : So you were eavesdropping, madame? I think I ought to be angry with you.

ANNA : Sire, I entered the ante-chamber only this moment !

PAHLEN : And madame knocked, doubtless, but the curtain gave no sound. And if madame played the spy, she only followed my example, did she not ?

ANNA : Yes, that is true !

CZAR : I am thirsty. . . . You shall come and drink with me. . . . The wine is good, but there's no body in it. Where is the brandy ?

PAHLEN : Here, sire. (*He pours out brandy.*) May I tell them your Majesty is ready for supper ?

CZAR : Yes, yes. . . .

[PAHLEN *opens a door and claps his hands. Servants quickly bring dishes and plates, and go out again.*

ANNA (*at the* CZAR'S *side*) : You should not drink so much, sire ! (*With emphasis*) You will need a clear head !

CZAR : That is what I cannot bear, Annuschka. Let me wrap myself in forgetfulness, let me know nothing more ! It is enough !

PAHLEN : Will you not take supper, sire ?

CZAR : I cannot eat—or watch you eating either. Come, let us drink ! (*His eyes already have a glassy stare.*) I say you are a bad man, Pahlen, but I drink to you.

PAHLEN : Perhaps you are right, sire.

ANNA : Will you not go to your room, sire ? It would be well for you to rest.

CZAR : I have no rest, I want no rest. . . . But you shall stroke my head, Annuschka . . . just now and then, just now and then. . . .

[ANNA *seats herself beside him.*

I wish I could read your thoughts, my friend Piotr.

PAHLEN : If it would rid me of them—I would gladly tell them to your Majesty !

[*A silence.*

CZAR : Piotr, I think—I think you are the devil of a fellow !

PAHLEN : And what does that mean, sire ?

CZAR : When you run away you run forward instead of backward, like most cowards. . . . And when you kill you wrestle with yourself instead of with your enemy, like most murderers. . . .

PAHLEN : And when the killing is done ?

CZAR : Then you find yourself not guilty, Pahlen.

PAHLEN : And what if one day I should find myself guilty ?

CZAR : Then you will hang yourself.

PAHLEN (*murmuring*) : Then I shall hang myself. . . .

CZAR : What are you mumbling there ?

PAHLEN (*aloud*) : Then I shall hang myself !

ANNA : But the Count will never find himself guilty.

PAHLEN : I wish I were as sure of that, madame.

ANNA : You will always find others to bear the blame.

PAHLEN : They grow fewer—fewer every hour.

CZAR (*rambling*) : Black words . . . . black thoughts . . . and black desires . . . all around us, like a sea of scalding tar ! Black hatred in our hearts . . . black doubt that cries for certainty. . . . What am I saying ? I might have shot you, Pahlen. . . .

PAHLEN : Why did you not ?

CZAR : Because I love you, little brother . . . and because I believe in you . . . and because I want to believe in you . . . and because I dare not think you my enemy and my judge !

ANNA : Sire, I beg of you, retire to Moscow !

CZAR : No, Annuschka, I shall not run away. I have pressing business here—with this Pahlen, who spins the merry-go-round for us all ! (*Turning to* PAHLEN) Tell me—when is it to be ?

PAHLEN (*taken aback*) : What, sire ?

CZAR : The affair with—Alexander ?

PAHLEN : Who knows ? Perhaps to-morrow night.

ANNA : Order your carriages ! Leave at day-break, sire !

CZAR (*sharply*) : Have I not told you I shall stay in Petersburg ? (*To* PAHLEN.) But why—why did you say to-morrow night ?

PAHLEN : Or perhaps in the course of the day. Nothing is settled yet.

CZAR (*obstinately*) : You said to-morrow night ! What is to happen then ?

ANNA (*clinging to the* CZAR *imploringly*) : Do not ask him any more, sire ! He can only lie to you !

Send him away, and listen to me ! I can tell you all you need to know !

PAHLEN (*coolly, with a smile*) : I think, sire, madame has taken a glass too much !

ANNA (*screaming*) : Call in the sentries, and arrest him !

PAHLEN : The wine has gone to her head.

ANNA : Kill him ! Kill him !

The CZAR *and* PAHLEN *laugh.*

CZAR : Kill him, hey ? Not bad, not bad ! You may do it yourself if you like !

PAHLEN (*still laughing, seizes the pistol and offers it to* ANNA) : Kill, madame, kill !

[ANNA *rushes from the room, while the* CZAR *continues to laugh.* PAHLEN *joins in noisily. A cry is heard.*)

CZAR (*suddenly checking himself*) : What was—that cry ?

PAHLEN : I heard nothing, sire.

CZAR : Someone screamed !

PAHLEN : Perhaps they are changing the guard.

[*A silence.*

CZAR : What—what ailed the Baroness ?

PAHLEN : You were right, sire. The wine went to her head.

[*The* CZAR *drinks.*

CZAR : Where is Anna ? Why does she not return ? Hey ?

PAHLEN : How should I know, sire ?

CZAR (*rising unsteadily*) : I must see. . . . I am going to see. . . .

[*He staggers towards the door.*

PAHLEN (*calling*) : Stepan !

[STEPAN *enters, meeting the* CZAR *face to face.*

STEPAN : Excellency ?

PAHLEN : Have you seen the Baroness Ostermann ?

STEPAN : Her ladyship drove away in your Excellency's carriage.

CZAR (*hoarsely, to* PAHLEN) : She went—in your carriage ?

PAHLEN (*smiling*) : It seems your Majesty will have to pass the night alone.

CZAR (*reaching drunkenly to grasp his hand*) : Alone ? No, no, I cannot bear to be alone ! You must stay with me, little father. . . . I am afraid when you are not there. . . . (*He pulls* PAHLEN *on to a chair and suddenly falls into his lap, clinging to his knees.*) Little father, you gave her to me and now you have taken her away. . . . But it was a cruel mother who gave me my life, and you are taking that as well. . . . I am sleepy, little father . . . so sleepy. . . . (*He goes to sleep with his head in* PAHLEN's *lap.*)

STEPAN (*approaching*) : Now, Excellency ? Shall it be now ?

STEPAN : No, for God's sake, no ! Was the Baroness hurt ?

STEPAN : She lies in a swoon. Ivan is watching her.

PAHLEN : I cannot move . . . with his weight upon me . . . heavier than a corpse itself. . . .

CZAR (*in delirium*) : There, Annuschka . . . you see, he could have killed me if he would . . . but he would not. . . .

PAHLEN : O God—forgive ! (*A silence.*) Will to-morrow never come ?

STEPAN : Is little father Excellency weeping ?

PAHLEN : No, Stepan, those are only drops of sweat—drops of sweat you see upon my cheeks.

CURTAIN

SCENE VI

The study of PAHLEN'S *house, on the following evening.*

A FOOTMAN *silently ushers in* ALEXANDER *and* COUNT VALERIAN SUBOFF.

ALEXANDER (*excitedly*) : Now that we are here, General, will you tell me what has happened ?

VALERIAN : Nothing, as yet.

ALEXANDER : Then what is going to happen ?

VALERIAN : Your Highness will learn soon enough.

ALEXANDER : Why do you bring me to Pahlen's house ?

VALERIAN : He will presently tell you that himself.

ALEXANDER : Count Suboff, if any man but you had summoned me to-night, I would not have come with him. But I was brought up from boyhood to respect you, and I know you will not betray a grandson of your Empress Catherine.

VALERIAN : Your Highness knows that I have been a soldier under three reigns. If I ask your support for Count Pahlen's confederacy, it is for your own sake and not for his. You will soon see how much you owe this man.

ALEXANDER : I shall owe him a throne, and every hour of my life will be burdened by the debt !

VALERIAN : Already you owe Pahlen more than a throne. Had he not intervened on your behalf

you would have been shot to-day by the Czar's command.

ALEXANDER : By my father's—command !

VALERIAN : Count Pahlen ordered me to bring you here for your own safety, Highness. It was necessary to protect your person. This is a house where the Czar's writ no longer runs.

[*A silence. The sound of marching troops is heard.*

ALEXANDER (*lowering his voice*) : No, only the Governor's decree ! The brigand has me in his power ! Needless to ask who kindled such suspicions of me in my father's mind. . . . Tell me, General, what are those troops I hear ?

VALERIAN : The guard is marching to the Palace.

ALEXANDER : And who—mounts guard—to-night ?

VALERIAN : The Semionovsky Regiment, Highness.

ALEXANDER : My regiment !

[PAHLEN *enters.*

PAHLEN : Highness, I trust you have forgiven the curt invitation that my friend Valerian brought you. There was no time for ceremony. Have you been told how matters stand ?

ALEXANDER : Count Suboff declares that my life is in danger from the Czar. But I have no proof of any change in my father's feelings towards me, and I know of no warrant for my arrest.

PAHLEN : Believe me, Prince, that is as well for you and all of us. Had the Czar moved openly

against you, there would be anarchy in Petersburg at this hour.

ALEXANDER : And was it thanks to you, Excellency, that he went to work more secretly ?

PAHLEN : Yes, Highness, it was thanks to me ; but I ask for no gratitude.

ALEXANDER : I wonder all the same at your omnipotence, which has saved me every misfortune but a visit to your house.

PAHLEN : Your Highness is pleased to be ironical. If you will be good enough to read this warrant, you will see that you are not yet out of danger.

[*He hands the warrant to* ALEXANDER, *who reads it and lets it slip through his trembling fingers.*

ALEXANDER : My father's signature ! And do you mean to arrest me, Governor ?

PAHLEN : Let us speak as if that document did not exist. It is enough that you should know . . . what my last answer may be. Do you understand me, Highness ?

ALEXANDER : I understand you !

PAHLEN : Then I ask you here and now, in presence of Valerian Suboff, who shall be our witness—I ask you here and now, do you approve the confederacy of which I am leader ? Are you prepared to mount the throne at the moment I shall have the honour to appoint ?

ALEXANDER (*as if choking*) : I am—I am—but tell me one thing only, Pahlen. What pledge can you give me for the safety of the Czar's life ?

PAHLEN (*slowly*) : What pledge—can I give you ?

VALERIAN : Our aim is to dethrone his Majesty —that is all.

ALEXANDER : I address myself to you, Count Pahlen, Governor of Petersburg. If you can lift the burden from my conscience, you shall be assured of my goodwill. Else we must part company, here and now.

PAHLEN (*after a silence*) : Prince, I will lift the burden from your conscience. Already I bear much upon my shoulders. The time will come when you will understand those words. I will answer for the Czar's life—with my own.

ALEXANDER (*with an effort*) : Then I swear solemnly before you, Count Pahlen, and before you, Count Suboff, by all I hold sacred, that I will use my endeavours to further the enterprise you have in hand. I swear also that I will assume the place to which my birth has destined me, at the hour which you appoint. Here is my hand upon it.

PAHLEN (*with the shadow of a smile*) : That was well spoken, Prince. I think you are too young to play with words. Now we are all honest men together—or all rogues, if you prefer it.

ALEXANDER : I beg you, Pahlen, let us have no more sneers. I am only human. . . .

PAHLEN : No, Highness, you are more than that. You are a good Czar already.

ALEXANDER (*turning away*) : And when—when is it to be ?

PAHLEN : At the hour when the Semionovsky Regiment mounts guard over the Palace.

ALEXANDER (*starting*) : But my regiment mounts guard to-night !

PAHLEN : Yes, Prince, to-night !

ALEXANDER : The troops have been marching this hour past ; but I have only this moment given my consent !

PAHLEN : Yes, this hour past !

ALEXANDER (*crying out*) : And if I had refused ?

PAHLEN (*with a shrug*) : Must I remind you of my last answer, Highness ? Had you failed us, the troops would still have marched.

ALEXANDER (*brokenly*) : Yes, yes. . . . I see that now. . . . My God, I see it now. . . .

PAHLEN : You must compose yourself, Highness. A room has been prepared for you upstairs, and you will have the goodness to retire to it for the present. The General will accompany you. Should our undertaking fail, which is unlikely, you must hold yourself in readiness for instant flight. *Au revoir*—sire.

[ALEXANDER *seems to shrink from the word as from a blow. He finds no reply, and leaves the room in silence, followed by* VALERIAN. PAHLEN *rings, and* STEPAN *enters immediately.*

PAHLEN : Are all the gentlemen here now, Stepan ?

STEPAN : All except the officers of the Semionovsky Regiment.

PAHLEN : General Talysin and Duke Plato ?

STEPAN : They are here, honoured Excellency.

PAHLEN : Our guests are very silent, Stepan.

STEPAN : Yes, they are drinking little and eating nothing and looking solemnly before them. And they are wearing all their decorations.

PAHLEN : I see you can use your eyes, Stepan. Can you feel your heart beating now ?

STEPAN : No, honoured Excellency.

PAHLEN : Honest fellow ! Now you will go upstairs and put on the hussar officer's uniform I have given you. And you must behave yourself like an officer, do you hear ? You need not say anything, but you need not stand to attention either ; and you will stay near me, Stepan. That is all.

STEPAN : Very well, honoured Excellency.

PAHLEN : Stay—what of the Baroness ?

STEPAN : She is ready, Excellency. A closed carriage is in waiting at the door. Ivan is waiting too.

PAHLEN : Then you may ask the Baroness to come to me, Stepan.

STEPAN : Yes, little father Excellency.

[STEPAN *goes out.* PAHLEN *rises and opens a door, from which comes a sound of quiet voices. He listens for an instant, then closes the door and opens a window. The sound of marching men grows louder.*

PAHLEN (*alone*) : Here a whisper, there a tramp of marching feet—echoes of myself, murmurs of my conspiracy. All is restless in that world outside ; but here within all is quiet. What is this stillness in my heart ? What is this peace that falls upon me ?

[*He is smiling when* ANNA *enters. She stands watching him.*

ANNA : Can you still smile, Pahlen ?

PAHLEN : Ah, it is you, Anna ! Yes, I can still smile.

ANNA : Do you order violence to be done to women, Pahlen ?

PAHLEN : Yes, Anna, if need be.

ANNA : And do you order—death as well ?

PAHLEN : That too, if need be.

ANNA : What is to happen to me, Pahlen ? Shall I remind you that I am a woman ?

PAHLEN : You were the only enemy I held dangerous. I respect you, Anna, but much is still at stake. I cannot afford to be chivalrous yet.

ANNA : What does that mean ?

PAHLEN : You are my prisoner—yes, Anna, my prisoner. Do not risk your life by attempting to escape. You will now be conveyed in a closed carriage to my country house at Petershof, and there you will be detained until to-morrow evening.

ANNA : And then ?

PAHLEN : Then you will be set free.

ANNA : And by that time the Czar will—the Czar will be—— ?

PAHLEN : Yes, Anna.

[*A silence.*

ANNA (*with hesitation*) : And shall I still be your enemy—then ?

PAHLEN (*with a low laugh*) : Little renegade ! No, then you will not be my enemy any more.

ANNA : I loved you once, Piotr ; you know that. I was fond of Paul too—and I pitied him. I wanted to save him, but I could not. Forgive me now.

PAHLEN : I have nothing to forgive you, Annuschka, or any one in the world but myself ; and myself I will not forgive. But if you forgive me, I am grateful to you. Now Ivan is waiting to escort you to Petershof. You must go with him.

ANNA : I want to kiss you first, Piotr.

PAHLEN : Kiss me then, Annuschka. (*They embrace.*) And look at me once more, if you will.

[*She goes out quickly. For an instant* PAHLEN *gazes after her ; then* STEPAN *enters wearing the uniform of a lieutenant of hussars, with a yellow sash.*

PAHLEN (*inspecting him closely*) : Yes, that will do. Now you may call in our guests.

[STEPAN *goes out and returns with* VALERIAN, DUKE PLATO, TALYSIN, *and other confederates.*

Brothers, the hour has come. To-night Russia will be set free. To-night Prince Alexander, our friend and well-wisher, will become our rightful Czar. Long live Alexander the First !

OFFICERS : Long live Alexander the First !

PAHLEN : A small party chosen from among ourselves will accomplish the dethronement. Count Valerian Suboff, I appoint you leader of this band. You will accompany the troops who are now advancing to the Palace courtyard.

Thence you will force your way into the Imperial bed-chamber and call upon the Czar to abdicate. You are authorised to use compulsion if need be. Here is the act of abdication which is to be signed by Paul, whether willingly or otherwise. A young comrade of ours (*he points to* STEPAN), who knows his way about the Palace, will be your guide. You may rely upon him—whatever may befall.

VALERIAN : And you, Pahlen ? Will you not be one of our party ?

PAHLEN : No, Excellency, I shall remain in the courtyard. We must have reserves in hand for every event.

DUKE PLATO (*vehemently*) : That looks to me like the white feather !

PAHLEN (*raising his voice*) : Silence ! I have my reasons, for I know my purpose.

DUKE PLATO : If you remain behind——

PAHLEN : Time presses ! Will you obey me ?

DUKE PLATO : Very well, General, I obey. But I do not relish the task before us.

PAHLEN : Nor I, Duke Plato. (*To* STEPAN) And you, lieutenant ?

STEPAN (*fiercely*) : I relish it, honoured Excellency !

[*All look at* STEPAN.

PAHLEN : And now, gentlemen, pray let your guide go first.

[STEPAN *leads the way, and the* OFFICERS *follow him.*

CURTAIN

SCENE VII

The CZAR'S *bed-chamber. The room has only one door, opposite which a hanging conceals the walled-up entrance to the* CZARINA'S *apartments. A lamp burns faintly beside the bed, on which the* CZAR *lies in a restless sleep. He awakens as though disturbed by some sudden sound. He sits up and listens.*

CZAR : What sound was that ? The rooks are cawing in the Summer Garden ! They are circling in the dark around the lime trees ; what has scared them ? The skies are empty but for God in Heaven, and He is quiet. He looks and listens and is silent. But the rooks are cawing ; what has scared them ? There must be tramping feet beneath the trees to send the rooks—my thousand rooks—all cawing through the night ! Many feet are tramping—whither ? They are coming here !

Let me throw off—this blackness of the night ! Doctor ! Doctor ! He is gone ! No one is with me any more. O God, this night ! The walls are sweating fear—and every drop an eye, a beady eye that seems to look upon me ! There ! —and there !—and there ! An old man's eyes —they stared upon me as I had him flogged—his eyes and others—eyes of tortured men and women !

And what comes now ? Remorse ! I cry for pity—let me pray before I stifle : Our Father, Which art in Heaven—— (*He prays in a whisper. Commotion is heard outside*). Now they are coming ! Oh, Piotr, little brother . . . now . . . now !

[*In the ante-room are heard low voices, hasty steps, and the sudden cry of sentries overpowered at the door of the bed-chamber.*

Help ! (*He leaps from the bed and runs to the walled-up door, beating upon the stonework with his fists.*) Help ! Our Father—hear me !

[VALERIAN *and* PLATO SUBOFF *force their way into the bed-chamber with drawn swords in their hands.* STEPAN *accompanies them, carrying a lantern. In the doorway appear* GENERAL TALYSIN *and other confederates. The* CZAR *has sought refuge behind a screen, which* STEPAN *overturns.*

CZAR : What do you want with me ?

VALERIAN : Sire, you are under arrest. Your reign is ended.

CZAR : Dogs that you are—how dare you ! By what right——?

VALERIAN : In the name of Czar Alexander, and by his command. . . .

CZAR (*bellowing*) : Alexander ! Let him be shot this very hour !

VALERIAN : Sire, pray calm yourself. Your own life is at stake. (*He presents the parchment given him by* PAHLEN.) In the name of Czar Alexander we require you to sign this act of abdication.

CZAR : Never ! I am Czar, and Czar I will remain !

VALERIAN : Resistance will be useless, sire. The army stands behind us.

CZAR : I will not sign, I say !

VALERIAN (*approaching*) : Then, sire, you oblige

us to use compulsion. If you wish to save your life you will sign this decree.

CZAR: Where is Count Pahlen? (*The confederates do not know what to answer, and look at one another. The* CZAR *screams his name at them.*) Pahlen! Pahlen! Help!

[*He leaps suddenly from behind the screen, takes* PLATO SUBOFF *by surprise, snatches the sword from beneath* VALERIAN'S *arm, and makes for the door brandishing the sword about him. At this moment* STEPAN *tears off his sash and throws his lantern down. In the darkness are heard cries for light, oaths and groans. At length an officer with a light enters from the ante-room.*

[*The* CZAR *lies in the midst of the floor, strangled with a yellow sash.* STEPAN *has vanished. The confederates are looking at each other in silence.*

[PAHLEN *now appears on the threshold. He comes in baring his head, and regards the body of the* CZAR. *He bends down and folds the hands on the breast, then crosses himself.*

CURTAIN

SCENE VIII

The scene is PAHLEN'S *house towards morning.* ALEXANDER, *fully dressed, is lying on a couch. The door opens, and* PAHLEN *and* VALERIAN *enter.* ALEXANDER *springs up and goes to meet them eagerly, with a questioning gesture.*

PAHLEN : Your Majesty, Paul Petrovitch is no longer Czar.

ALEXANDER : What—what has befallen him ?

PAHLEN : Death, your Majesty.

ALEXANDER : And his murderer dares to stand before me ! Have you come for your thirty pieces of silver, Count Pahlen ? Do you hope to be made a Grand Duke or a Prince ?

[PAHLEN *goes up to him with fury in his eyes, and* ALEXANDER *draws back.* VALERIAN *intervenes to separate the pair.*

VALERIAN : Your Majesty, Count Pahlen was not in the bed-chamber when the murder was done. The Czar was strangled by an unknown hand. That is the whole truth.

PAHLEN : No, sire, that is not the whole truth ! I am the murderer.

VALERIAN : Are you mad ?

PAHLEN (*thrusting* VALERIAN *aside, and speaking with sudden calm*) : Sire, remember that you yourself bade me take the burden from your conscience ! I obeyed you then ; I obey you still. In the name of the burden I have lifted from you, I entreat you to be silent. Nay, I command you—I command !

[ALEXANDER *makes as if to speak, but sinks slowly on to the couch, and thence, sobbing, to the ground.* PAHLEN *regards his prostrate figure coldly.*

My task will very soon be ended. I shall neither be court-martialled nor rewarded with a princedom. But your task is just beginning. Let us speak no more of a night that is not yet over. Rise up, sire, rise up and listen to your Minister !

[*He goes to his desk and takes a parchment from a drawer. Meanwhile* ALEXANDER, *supported by* VALERIAN, *has risen to his feet.*

Your first duty, sire, will be to make this proclamation to your people. It declares that Czar Paul passed away suddenly in the night, and that Czar Alexander has ascended the throne of his ancestors. When you have signed this proclamation my duty will be fulfilled.

[ALEXANDER *takes the document, glances at it, and signs with a movement of resignation.*

I thank you, Sire. That is all. I have—no more to do.

VALERIAN (*to* ALEXANDER) : Sire, I will attend you to the Palace. (*To* PAHLEN.) Farewell, Count.

PAHLEN : Farewell, Valerian. (VALERIAN *goes to the door.*) Majesty, God be with you now !

[ALEXANDER *grasps his hand and seems about to speak, then suddenly bends and kisses both his hands before hurrying out. When he is gone,* PAHLEN *stands looking at his hands with a smile. He presently calls :* Stepan !

[STEPAN *enters, yawning as though drunk with sleep. From the street is heard a murmur of voices, gradually swelling in the course of the scene to huzzas and shouts of " Long live the Czar ! " The dawn begins to appear.*

Stepan, bring brandy and tumblers. A glass for yourself as well.

[STEPAN *brings a bottle and glasses and places them on the desk ; then, with the movement of some faithful animal, he lurches to the floor near the doorway and falls asleep again at once.* PAHLEN *seats himself at his desk, his face cold and drawn with fatigue. He rearranges some papers and destroys others. He pours out a glass of brandy, drinks, looks towards the window, and presently shuts a drawer that he has opened. The sound awakens* STEPAN, *who springs up suddenly and rubs his eyes.* PAHLEN *regards him with a smile.*

Did I wake you, my brave Stepan ? Well, it is time.

[*He fills a tumbler with brandy and beckons to him.* Here, Stepan. But you are not to drink so much as I—do you hear ?

[STEPAN, *still half asleep, drinks off the glass at a gulp.* PAHLEN *fills a pipe and watches him.*

Stepan, my friend, why do you think I have done all this ? Do you think it is because I love my country ?

STEPAN (*apathetic*) : You are a great man, honoured Excellency.

PAHLEN (*still smiling*) : But listen to me, Stepan. If the Czar had managed to escape from you, I would have saved his life and had you shot as traitors, every man of you. That was why I waited in the courtyard. Now what do you say of me, friend Stepan ?

STEPAN : You are a great rascal, little father.

PAHLEN : Bravo, Stepan, bravo ! But then the world would have called me a faithful servant of my master ; and still the plot would have begun again from the beginning. That is the way of

plots, Stepan. (STEPAN *stares at him stupidly.*) Now answer me one last riddle. If I am such a great rascal, why have I given you orders to shoot us both at dawn ?

STEPAN : Because you are a great man all the same, little father Excellency.

PAHLEN : And great men must never break faith ! (*Drinking.*) You are right again, Stepan, you are always right ! (*He takes two pistols from a drawer of the desk.*) And now you must not drink any more, Stepan. One of us must have a steady hand. (*Handing him the pistols.*) When it strikes seven, do you hear ? That will not be long.

[*He rises and goes to a chair by the window.*

Now come quite close to me, brother Stepan. Are you fond of me ?

STEPAN : Yes, little father.

PAHLEN : And can I depend upon you, Brother Stepan ? Just once more ?

STEPAN : Yes, little father.

PAHLEN : Look, Stepan, at these hands of mine . . . they have been kissed by an Emperor. And look at these lips of mine . . . they have kissed another Emperor's hands. And both of them my Emperors . . . my Emperors. . . . I am . . . what am I ? . . . but let us speak no more of that, Brother Stepan, no more of anything. Close the shutters. (STEPAN *obeys.*) Sing me a little song, Brother Stepan . . . one of our country songs.

[STEPAN *begins to sing a Russian peasant song. As the curtain slowly falls, the clock of a neighbouring church begins to strike seven. The song ends on the first stroke, and two shots ring out on the last.*

THE END

MRS. MOONLIGHT

T

By the same author

THIS WOMAN BUSINESS

A MAN WITH RED HAIR
(from the novel by Hugh Walpole)

MUD AND TREACLE

THE DEVIL

MRS. MOONLIGHT

A Piece of Pastiche

in Three Acts

by

BENN W. LEVY

The play was first publicly performed on December 5th, 1928, at the KINGSWAY THEATRE, *London, with the following cast :—*

Tom Moonlight	LEON QUARTERMAINE
Minnie	FRANCES ROSS-CAMPBELL
Edith Jones	MARY BARTON
Sarah Moonlight	JOAN BARRY
Percy Middling	BLIGH CHESMOND
Jane Moonlight	ALISON LEGGAT
Willie Ragg	WALTER PEARCE
Peter	ROBERT DOUGLAS

The play was produced by MR. W. GRAHAM BROWNE

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To
MY FATHER

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

(in the order of their first appearance)

TOM MOONLIGHT

MINNIE

EDITH JONES

SARAH MOONLIGHT

PERCY MIDDLING

JANE MOONLIGHT

WILLIE RAGG

PETER

ACT I

*After breakfast on Sunday morning—it is September 3rd, 1881—*MR. TOM MOONLIGHT *reads his Sunday newspaper. His tingling sense of physical well-being after so good a breakfast and so good a shave is such that the near prospect of church becomes almost a pleasure. But this particular Sunday tingles even more keenly than the other fifty-one in the year, as we shall very soon understand. And so it is that the minor earthquake reported in the morning news assumes for* MR. MOONLIGHT *less importance than the correct tailing-off of his own coveted whiskers, in which* MR. MOONLIGHT *(who, after all, is only a few years the wrong side of forty) takes an excusable pride. It is merely his bad luck that no sooner has he finally abandoned that Sunday newspaper, and taken to whisker-trimming in real earnest with the scissors from his penknife and the mirror in the overmantel, that* MINNIE *should intrude upon his privaey :* MINNIE, *who, we can all tell at a glance, is just the kind of person to misunderstand such an occupation. It is not because she wears an apron that we can tell this, but merely that our knowledge of men and women, which has always been pretty sound, assures us that so forthright, unconciliatory a countenance, perched upon so nondescript a little body, could never conceal that degree of sympathetic understanding which appreciates that whiskers, like everything else in this unmanageable world, need caring for, even on a Sunday.*

But MR. MOONLIGHT *is not the man to be put out of countenance. He sticks to his guns ; which is to say, his penknife.*

TOM (*scowling*) : What do *you* want ?

MINNIE (*the insubordinate creature*) : Oh, I just thought it might do me good to watch how an Englishman improves his mind a Sabbath morning.

[*Yes, we might have guessed it ; one of the strongest Highland accents we have heard. Come to think of it, we did guess it.*

TOM : Well, that's not what I pay you for.

MINNIE : No, I throw that in extra. *I*'m not mean.

TOM (*petulantly*) : Nor am I.

MINNIE : A Scotsman wouldn't forget his wife's birthday.

TOM : No, he mightn't *forget* it. (*He thinks he has scored this time.*)

MINNIE : Whatever else we may be, no one could ever say we were mean.

TOM : Heaven preserve me !

MINNIE : Nothing will preserve you if you add blasphemy to your other sins. (*Then, in a tone that* DIVES *might use to* LAZARUS) Still, I'll pray for you this morning, if you like.

TOM : I don't like.

MINNIE : As you will. Did you ever read the story of Scrooge ?

TOM : Yes. Why ?

MINNIE : No reason. Only that he was the kind of man to forget his wife's birthday.

TOM (*his temper rising*) : I did *not* forget it. (*He makes a vicious snip at the poor whisker.*) It's coming home this morning.

MINNIE (*sceptical*) : Sunday ?

TOM : A special errand-boy.

MINNIE (*unappeased*) : A bit late.

TOM : I tell you it's not my fault. It should have been ready yesterday when I called. Something hadn't arrived.

MINNIE : So they promised to send it here this morning ?

TOM : Yes. And I hate having fault found with me.

MINNIE (*the ignorant woman dares to be sarcastic !*) : Most people like it. What is it ?

TOM : What is what, madam ?

MINNIE : Your poor wee giftie.

TOM : Mind your own business. (*What a way for a grown-up man to behave !*) And it isn't poor ; nor wee.

MINNIE (*the shameful doubter*) : We'll see.

TOM : Why aren't you looking after my daughter, woman ?

MINNIE : Do you mean Jane ?

TOM : Who in—in the world do you *suppose* I mean ?

MINNIE : She's with her lovely parent, she is.

TOM (*a poor attempt to regain dignity*) : Do you mean Mrs. Moonlight ?

MINNIE (*who would never allow that*) : Who in the world do you *suppose* I mean ?

TOM (*justifiably exasperated*) : You're a most disagreeable old woman.

MINNIE : You're in your forty-fourth year ; I'm in my thirty-ninth.

TOM : But *my* forty-fourth year only contains twelve months.

MINNIE : Your collar's turned up at the back.

TOM (*a beaten man*) : I know. I like it like that. (*He pretends to read a line or two of his newspaper.*) By the way, Minnie, I've been thinking quite seriously of giving you notice.

MINNIE : If it weren't for your sweet wife I'd let you. Do you suppose I'd be here if she went ?

TOM (*loftily*) : Yes, I think you would. In your own queer barbaric Scotch way you're really very attached to me. Still, I'm afraid I shall have to dismiss you. In many ways you don't quite suit.

MINNIE (*with impatient contempt*) : Ah, away with you ! Why do you try to talk so grand ? Consider yourself lucky to be living in the same house with us.

TOM : With us, madam ?

MINNIE : With Sarah Moonlight and me and wee Jane.

TOM : Has it ever occurred to you that I pay for this house ?

MINNIE: And you should be glad to do it, and not bother us.

TOM : Has it occurred to you I might never have consented to marry Sarah if I'd known it meant taking you on as well ?

MINNIE : *Consented* to marry Sarah ? Did *she* ask *you* ? I seem to remember a very doleful and forlorn suitor, mooning about till I thought he was fey, pale in the cheek, pink in the eye, waiting hungrily for a smile or word from Sarah, his arms for ever full of posies ; a very foolish loon.

TOM (*thundering*) : Woman, be silent !

[*Now, how should* MINNIE *have gained the knowledge of men to guess that this is one of* TOM'S *most vulnerable spots ?*

MINNIE : Nobody could have known in those days that this was the man who would forget his wife's birthday.

[*Oh, the nagging woman !*

TOM (*after several fruitless attempts at articulation*) : Creature, answer the bell !

[*Yes, we have heard it too, and so has* MINNIE, *for she is already on her way.*

MINNIE : It's your poor wee giftie, I expect.

[*And she is gone. Alone* MR. MOONLIGHT *can adjust his collar without impairing his dignity. When* MINNIE *returns, it is not with a parcel, but with* MRS. MOONLIGHT'S *sister. Exercising that intuition of ours again, how at first glance do we sum up* EDITH JONES *? Thirty-five or thereabouts ? A trifle severe ? A shade discontented ? We have not time to go into it further, for she is speaking.*

EDITH : Good morning, Thomas.

TOM : And good morning to you, my dear Edith. How are you ?

EDITH : Nicely, I thank you. Where is Sarah ?

TOM : Sarah is not yet down.

[EDITH *sniffs. We thought she would.*

EDITH : It's half-past ten.

TOM (*for the defence*) : She wasn't in bed till midnight last night.

EDITH : A party ?

TOM : Yes, a little party.

[*Hang it,* EDITH JONES *sniffs again !*

EDITH : Well, maybe if I had a husband he would indulge *me* no less.

TOM : Maybe.

[TOM !

EDITH : Still, that doesn't make it right. You're looking very well to-day.

MINNIE : For pity's sake don't tell him that.

TOM : Minnie, be quiet. A little gaiety occasionally agrees with me. But, 'pon my word, I was just about to say the same of you, my dear Edith. You're looking well ; deuced well, if I may say so.

EDITH (*with dignity and no self-pity*) : Cinderella's ugly sisters never look well.

TOM : My dear Edith, Sarah has no ugly sisters. Indeed, you're not *really* even her sister, are you ?

EDITH : You do not need to remind me, Thomas, that I was only a foundling child charitably adopted by Sarah's parents. I am quite conscious already that I am not *really* Sarah's sister.

TOM (*distressed by her touchiness*) : My dear Edith, you are so quick to take offence. You know quite well that you are all that a real sister could be to Sarah, and more : an extremely well-beloved elder sister.

EDITH : Older by nearly ten years, and it looks like twenty.

TOM (*not too tactfully*) : Well, Sarah looks particularly young for her age. She wishes she didn't. You know, that's her sore point.

EDITH : You needn't make excuses for me. I'm not vain.

TOM : My dear Edith, I wasn't attempting to. And, if you'll allow me to say so, you have, in my humble opinion, an indefinable charm and dignity of which everyone must constantly be conscious.

EDITH (*with unexpected vehemence*) : I'm not your dear Edith ! And you can keep your nasty philandering ways for those that like it, Thomas Moonlight.

TOM (*quietly*) : I beg your pardon. (*He turns away. And, as he does so,* EDITH JONES *can barely check a relenting gesture, a gesture that to us sharper ones almost suggests . . . but we shall see.* TOM'S *voice, when he speaks next, is suitably distant.*) Minnie, will you please inform Mrs. Moonlight that her sister has called to accompany us to church.

MINNIE : It's not nearly time for church.

[MINNIE, *who has been grimly knitting with innumerable clacking needles—as, indeed, she does at all odd moments—perched on her own particular corner of the high fender, her short legs a-dangle half a yard from the ground, doesn't budge.*

EDITH : I came early to see Jane.

MINNIE : She's with her mother.

A VOICE : No, she's not. (*Yes, it's* SARAH MOONLIGHT. *But oh, she is so pretty ! Can this blooming young creature really have a daughter of five ?*) Good morning, Edith dear.

[*They kiss each other characteristically.*

EDITH : Many happy returns of the day. Here's my present.

[*She hands* SARAH *a parcel, and sits as one who has discharged a disagreeable duty.*

SARAH : Oh, you are kind to me. What is it ?

EDITH : I'm afraid you may not like it.

SARAH (*gaily tackling the string*) : Is that why you chose it ?

EDITH : No ; but there's always the chance.

MINNIE : There's always the chance.

SARAH (*her tone involuntarily despondent as she extracts something from the parcel*) : Oh, a shawl ! (*But she recovers clumsily.*) I mean—oh, a shawl ! (*This time she says it with bright enthusiasm.*) What a lovely one !

[TOM, *who is laughing, though he knows quite well he shouldn't, receives a private grimace from his wife.*

EDITH (*almost with satisfaction*) : I thought you wouldn't like it.

SARAH : But I do, my dear. I think it's sweet.

MINNIE : And on a Sabbath, too !

TOM : Will you be silent, woman !

EDITH (*placidly*) : Leave her alone, Thomas. Minnie is right.

SARAH (*coaxing prettily*) : You shouldn't be so sensitive, dear. I've said nothing to make you think I'm not very, very pleased with my shawl.

EDITH : I can see a thing when it's plain before my nose. You don't like it because you think shawls are for old people.

SARAH : Oh, Edith, how absurd !

EDITH : Well, middle-aged people. But, if you don't look middle-aged yourself, at least you're a mother and a married woman.

TOM (*imprudently*) : I should hope so.

EDITH (*unruffled*) : And married to a middle-aged man.

TOM (*outraged*) : I'm barely over forty !

EDITH : Forty-four is more than half of eighty, and who knows that you won't die at sixty. You think too much of your age, and such vanity, both of you.

SARAH (*suddenly sobered ; strangely*) : Do you think *I* do, Edith ?

EDITH : Since you ask me, I do. You dress too young. Several people have mentioned it.

TOM : The cats are envious. Sarah doesn't dress young ; she looks young.

EDITH : Put it which way you like. But answer me this : did Sarah look a day younger at twenty-one or twenty or nineteen than she does to-day ?

TOM (*reluctantly*) : Well—no. But is that a crime ?

EDITH : I didn't say so.

SARAH (*strangely serious*) : Do you *think* so ?

EDITH : It's hardly my business.

SARAH (*with the same slow urgency*) : Please answer me, Edith.

EDITH : Then I think it's not a crime, but—but bad taste. Someone said the other day you powder your nose.

[*But* SARAH *doesn't smile.*

SARAH : And if I don't ? If it's not my fault that I don't seem to change much ?

EDITH : Whose fault can it be ?

SARAH : But just supposing ? It wouldn't be bad taste then ?

EDITH (*not quite at ease*) : Then I should say it was —odd.

SARAH : What do you mean by " odd " ?

EDITH : Just odd.

[TOM *has been vainly signalling* EDITH *to evade this subject.*

SARAH : I see. (*The silence is a trifle oppressive, as* SARAH *stands thoughtfully twisting a letter that she holds in her hand. Then suddenly, with a little effort, she breaks the spell, speaking in her old gay fashion.*) Who do you think this is from ? (*She holds the letter aloft.*) You'll never guess. It came last night.

EDITH : I don't know. Who is it from ?

SARAH : Maud.

EDITH (*with awe*) : From your sister Maud ?

SARAH (*mimicking*) : Yes, and *your* sister Maud.

EDITH : What does she want ?

SARAH : She wants to tell me that she's just had a baby.

EDITH (*though her sniff expresses more than her words*) : As brazen as ever. Though what can you expect ? Especially living in those foreign parts.

SARAH : And with a foreign husband.

EDITH : Carlo is *not* her husband.

SARAH (*with a little toss*) : *I* consider him her husband.

EDITH : Very likely. But God doesn't.

SARAH : How do *you* know ?

EDITH : Don't be irreverent, Sarah. It doesn't become you. Do you often hear from her, pray ?

SARAH : This is the first letter for two years—since she went away. I wrote to her twice, but she didn't answer. After the way her family treated her, I'm not surprised. She had some pride.

EDITH : May I ask if you expect a family to rejoice and make merry when their daughter runs off with a married man ?

SARAH : It wasn't her fault he was married.

EDITH : It was her fault that she ran off with him.

SARAH : She loved him.

EDITH : Then she shouldn't have fallen in love with a married man.

SARAH : Do you really suppose a woman can stop herself falling in love just because a man is married ?

[*Poor* EDITH *drops her eyes.*

EDITH (*rather quietly*) : I don't say it's easy, but—but it can be done. (SARAH *wishes she had not asked the question.*) I suppose you won't answer the letter ?

SARAH : I think I shall, Edith.

EDITH (*to* TOM) : Do you propose to let her ?

TOM : Well, of course I *could* put my foot down, but——

SARAH : Could you, darling ?

TOM : Of course I could ! Indeed, I've a good mind to. What do you mean ?

SARAH : Only that I know you'd never do anything to make me unhappy.

TOM (*taking his foot up again*) : I was merely going to say it's not a question for me so much as for Sarah and her own conscience.

EDITH (*sniffing*) : Very modern, I'm sure.

TOM (*not displeased*) : Well, we must be broad-minded, you know. After all, Maud's husband's

—er—wife—er—what would you call her exactly, dear ?

SARAH : How about Maud's wife-in-law ?

TOM : Well, anyway, Carlo's real wife—first wife——

EDITH (*emphatically*) : Real wife, legal wife, only wife.

TOM : Yes ; yes, that's the one I mean. I was merely going to say that, after all, she *is* a deuced disagreeable woman.

EDITH : Just because she doesn't choose to divorce her husband ?

TOM : Well, she doesn't want him herself, you know. You remember the dog in the manger.

EDITH : Matrimonial problems have never seemed to me best solved by comparisons from the farmyard. But, in any case, Carlo and his wife are both Catholics. The Pope wouldn't allow her a divorce, even if she wanted one.

TOM : Of course, I'm a Protestant myself, but it seems a little hard to blame it on the Pope.

[*We hear the bell again, and* MINNIE *goes to answer it.*

EDITH (*quite properly disregarding* TOM's *last contribution*) : Is it a boy or a girl ?

SARAH : A girl.

EDITH : Poor little mite has a pretty future before her ! What have they called her ?

SARAH : Joy.

EDITH : Ironically, I presume.

SARAH : Don't let's be pessimistic. Perhaps people aren't so particular in Florence.

EDITH : Do they still live in Florence ?

SARAH : Of course. His work is there. (*Reading the address from her letter*) Villa Caneloni, Piazza del Santa Catrina, Florence.

[*She puts the letter away in* TOM'S *desk, and turns to find* MINNIE, *reappeared and holding in her arms a large parcel. To* TOM'S *triumphant grin that aggravating Minnie merely returns a scowl.*]

MINNIE (*handing it to Sarah*) : Here it is.

SARAH : Here what is ?

TOM : A little birthday present from me, my dear.

SARAH : Oh, Tom, you're an angel.

MINNIE (*resuming her fender seat*): A very unpunctual angel !

SARAH : Very likely. He's that kind of angel.

MINNIE : Angels don't forget their wives' birthdays.

TOM : Angels don't have wives.

MINNIE : And what do they have, then ?

TOM : They have—I don't know what they have ! Anyway, it's no business of yours, and never will be !

SARAH : Besides, he didn't forget my birthday. This is a second present. I have had one already.

[*She is undoing the parcel.*

MINNIE : What was it ?

SARAH : A little bag.

MINNIE : He didn't tell *me* anything about it.

TOM (*loftily*) : I didn't choose to.

MINNIE : What kind of a bag ?

SARAH : A little canvas bag.

MINNIE : Anything in it ?

SARAH : Yes, sovereigns.

MINNIE : Chocolate ones ?

SARAH : No, gold ones.

MINNIE : How many ?

SARAH : Fifty.

MINNIE : Have you counted them ?

SARAH : No. And you're a nasty disagreeable old curmudgeon, and you're not to tease him. Oh, Tom ! A dress ! (*And she lifts from the box a splendour of pink velvet, cream lace, and pale blue bows, her eyes gleaming brighter at each new glory revealed.*) Oh, Tom dear ! (*She hugs him and she hugs him.*) Mr. Moonlight ! Darling Mr. Moonlight ! Darling Mr. Moonlight ! (*And* MR. MOONLIGHT *holds her close.*) What made you ?

TOM : I just had an idea.

SARAH : Oh, Tom ! Here, Minnie, undo me. (*She presents her back.*)

EDITH : For goodness' sake, what are you going to do ?

SARAH : Try it on.

EDITH : Here ?

MINNIE : And why not here ? He's her husband, isn't he ?

[*By now her frock is about her feet, and, as she steps out, even the most tolerant of us can scarce forbear to smile. Those layers of stiff silk petticoats, and at least one of them purple silk ! The frothy lace billowing above corsets so relentless that her plump little figure resembles nothing so much as an hour-glass !*)

SARAH (*crooning, purring*) : There isn't such another dress in Europe !

TOM (*modestly*) : As a matter of fact, I designed it myself.

SARAH : Oh, Tom !

TOM : At least, Madame Chose and I did together. I'd been giving quite a lot of thought to it, and felt that you in pink velvet——

SARAH : Who thought of these bows ?

TOM : Er—Madame Chose thought of them.

SARAH : Oh, Minnie, isn't it too lovely ?

MINNIE : The bows are not too bad.

SARAH : Horrid creature ! Edith, what do you think ?

EDITH (*softening before such delight*) : It's a very pretty frock, my dear.

SARAH : Dear Edith !

[*The dress is on, and* SARAH *stands still, like a happy child.*

TOM (*proudly*) : It's not too bad ; upon my word, it's not too bad.

SARAH : I'm a queen, I'm a queen !

MINNIE : What trinkets will you wear ?

SARAH : Yes, Tom, what jewellery ? My crystals ?

EDITH : It wants something with a touch of blue.

SARAH : I don't think I have anything blue.

TOM : Yes, you have, my dear. The what-you-may-call-it. You know. You haven't worn it for years and years. The Dreird.

SARAH : No ! (*It is almost a scream ; a cry of fear.*)

TOM (*in gentle surprise*) : My dear !

[*She avoids his eye ; she avoids everybody's eye.*

EDITH : What is the Dreird ?

SARAH (*her eyes still cast down*) : It's a necklace—made of turquoise. It's very pretty and very, very old. It belonged to Minnie. It was in her family for centuries, and she gave it to me for a wedding present.

EDITH : Then why not wear that ?

SARAH (*quietly but stubbornly*) : No.

TOM : Edith's right, my dear. It would just do.

SARAH : No.

TOM : But you used to like it when we were first married ?

MINNIE : And she doesn't now. Can't you let the bairn alone ?

TOM (*a little querulous*) : But it does need a touch of blue.

MINNIE : Then you can buy her some sapphires.

TOM : Do you think I'm *made* of money, woman ?

MINNIE : It's a puzzle to me *what* you're made of.

EDITH : Why not wear a wreath of blue flowers ?

SARAH (*throwing off the spell*) : Yes, a wreath, a wreath ! Here, look !

[*She plucks a tall stem of larkspur from a specimen vase, and, bending it into a small circle, she pins it at a jaunty Pompadour angle to her soft hair.*

EDITH (*irrelevantly, as she gets up*) : You're a lucky girl. (*It is almost a sigh.*)

SARAH : I am. And so is Tom.

EDITH : So is Tom. (*She is by the door now.*) I'm going to see Jane.

MINNIE : I'm coming with you.

[*And* TOM *and his wife are alone.*

SARAH : Tom, you should be very, very nice to Edith.

TOM : Well, I am, aren't I ?

SARAH : Yes.

TOM : Why ?

SARAH : You see, she's—she's in love with you.

TOM : Rubbish !

SARAH : It's true.

TOM (*preening himself, delightedly*) : I don't believe it.

SARAH : Then you're very unobservant.

TOM : Not more than the next man, I flatter myself.

SARAH : Poor Edith.

TOM : There's no "poor Edith" about it. Edith's a very sensible, and in many ways attractive, woman. A woman like that would never be single if she didn't want to be.

SARAH : Maybe. Still, she's in love with you. (*Tempting him*) You're too modest to see it.

TOM : Oh, I quite realise that she *likes* me. Probably she respects me. But I don't think more than most other women.

SARAH : Then perhaps they're all in love with you, Mr. Moonlight. (*She kisses him.*) Except me.

TOM (*as she settles on the arm of his chair*) : You ? Why, you adore me !

SARAH : I don't.

TOM : Mrs. Moonlight, you worship me.

SARAH : Mr. Moonlight, I don't.

[*But she rubs the back of his hand against her cheek all the same.*

TOM : Then why, pray, had you the audacity to marry me ?

SARAH : Pity, Mr. Moonlight.

TOM (*rather cleverly*) : Self-pity, madam, is a disgusting trait.

SARAH (*stroking his hair*) : How dare you twist my words, sir ! You know quite well that any girl with the name of Sarah Jones would readily make enormous sacrifices in order to be called Sarah Moonlight.

[*He beams at her.*

TOM (*his voice quieter*) : Sarah Moonlight.

SARAH : Yes, blessed ?

TOM (*humbly*) : *I* love *you.*

SARAH : Dear, dear Mr. Moonlight.

TOM : As much as ever.

SARAH : And after five long years.

TOM : As much as the first time.

SARAH : Do you remember the first time ?

TOM : Yes. Do you *know* the first time ? (*She nods.*)

SARAH : I was singing.

[*Suddenly she slips from his chair and sits at the piano. While she sings, her eyes smile at him fondly.*

Oh, for the wings, for the wings of a dove,
Far away, far away would I rove——

A light, slight, clear voice, that draws him till he is seated on the music-bench beside her. When the last

notes of Mendelssohn's gentle song have died away, and the piano chords still quiver, they remain still and dumb for a moment or two ; till suddenly SARAH, *breaking free of the enchantment, gaily, mischievously strikes the keyboard, and raises her voice to a very different kind of song :*

> Tommy, make room for your uncle,
> There's a little dear——

And MR. MOONLIGHT *stifles her gurgling laughter with kisses.*

SARAH : Unhand me, Mr. Moonlight ! What a way for old married people to behave !

[*She moves away from him sedately.*

TOM : Old married people, indeed ! (*She is at the mirror.*) Look at the old married lady in front of you !

SARAH (*seriously, with a glance that is almost haunted*) : I look my years.

TOM : You don't. (*She closes her eyes at a sudden stab of pain. What a strange girl it is !*) And for that matter, if I may say so, I don't keep too badly myself in a dry place. Look your years ! It's my belief you never will.

SARAH (*a little wildly*) : Please, Tom ! You know that hurts—that hateful subject.

TOM : I'm sorry, dear. I thought you were over that silly fancy.

SARAH : Tom.

TOM : Yes, dear.

SARAH : I'm frightened.

TOM : Frightened ? What of ?

SARAH : Come and sit by me. (*He sits by her,*

holding her hand. She is definitely trembling.) Supposing, Tom, supposing someone should be born who never really did grow any older ; I mean, after a certain age. At least, who never looked any older. What would happen ?

TOM : She'd probably make a fortune in a freak show.

SARAH : Please be serious, Tom.

TOM : How can I be serious about such nonsense ?

SARAH : But just supposing. What do you think would happen ?

TOM : Well, in the olden times she'd probably have been burnt as a witch.

SARAH : And what nowadays ?

TOM : Nowadays we have other methods of dealing with witches—less crude perhaps, but just as nasty.

SARAH : What would *you* think of such a person ?

TOM : Me ? I should think she was a freak.

SARAH : It would be horrible to be a freak. One couldn't love a freak, I suppose.

TOM : Not a decent, normal man, I should think.

SARAH : What loneliness !

TOM : My dear, you're trembling. (*Gently*) Mrs. Moonlight, please don't be morbid. Do you think *you're* a freak just because people still pay you compliments on your looks at the ripe old age of twenty-eight ?

SARAH : You hear them talking more than I, Tom. Is it always compliments ?

TOM : Well, mostly.

SARAH : Mostly ?

TOM : Yes—very often.

SARAH : Edith didn't seem to think so.

TOM : Edith's jealous.

SARAH : No, she's not. She never has been that. I've heard murmurs myself—already—although I am only twenty-eight. They think it's odd. (*Barely above a whisper*) So do I. I know I looked like this five years ago; and ten years ago. Once upon a time I used to pray above all things that I should never grow older, look older. I think that was wicked, as well as silly. I thought you'd stop loving me if I did. Now I think you'll stop if I don't. (*She has worked herself up almost to a pitch of wildness.*)

TOM: But you will, darling ; of course you'll look older in time.

SARAH : You'd rather I did ?

TOM : Of course I would. There's quite enough that's miraculous about my wife without that.

SARAH (*trying to control herself*) : It sounds foolish when I talk about it to you ; but not when I'm alone. Sometimes it's frightened me till I could hardly help screaming. Like a nightmare that's always there. I wake up in the night crying quietly, and I've wanted to wake you. It's at the back of my mind always—always rasping, fretting, scratching at my brain—till sometimes I feel I'm going mad and can't stand it any longer. You see, it's growing stronger, not weaker ; every year for years, ever since Jane was born. (*Hardly above a whisper*) I don't know

what's going to happen. One day it will drive—drive me to——

TOM (*comforting her*) : Silly Mrs. Moonlight !

SARAH : Do you think I'm just fanciful ?

TOM : Certainly I do. And you always were. It's much too early for *you* to jump to conclusions. Ninon de l'Enclos kept her looks long after twenty-eight. *She* looked young when she was seventy.

SARAH : Poor lady. How tired she must have felt ! Tom.

TOM : Yes, dear.

SARAH : You'll always believe, whatever happens, that I love you, won't you ?

TOM : Yes, dear ; but nothing can or will or shall happen. In fact, I promise you that in the morning you will look a hundred and two. There, will that satisfy you ?

[MINNIE *returns*.

MINNIE (*to* TOM) : The bairn's asking to see you before she goes out.

TOM : I'll go to her now.

MINNIE (*to* SARAH) : She's a strange child in many ways, that.

[*Can she never let the poor man alone ? He growls at her as a dog might at a cat, and slams the door behind him. And no wonder.*

SARAH : Minnie. (*She is speaking half to herself.*) I don't know what will become of me.

MINNIE : Of course you don't. Which of us does ?

SARAH : I'm never—— (*She has difficulty in saying it aloud.*) I'm never going to look any older.

MINNIE : What rubbish is this !

[*But* MINNIE *is not at ease.*

SARAH (*almost a cry*) : It's true. I know it. I know it. I suppose I've really known it for some time.

MINNIE : Ah, away with you !

SARAH : But I didn't think it would matter.

MINNIE : And nor it would.

SARAH : Then you know, too, it's true ?

MINNIE : Indeed, I know no such nonsense !

SARAH (*meaningly*) : Your necklace, Minnie.

MINNIE : What about my stupid old necklace ?

[*This is a nasty moment for* MINNIE.

SARAH : And the legend ?

MINNIE : I tell you I know no legend.

SARAH : One wish to every owner ?

MINNIE : Why do you plague your head with that fally-diddle ?

SARAH : *I* wished, Minnie. It was just before Jane was born, and I used to wear your necklace always. (MINNIE *is dabbing at her eyes with a corner of her apron.*) I was afraid that, when Jane was born, I might not be so pretty, and Tom might love me less. So I wished and wished that I might never look any older. (*There is silence for a moment.*) I wished and I wished. That legend, Minnie ; it's not fally-diddle, is it ?

MINNIE : Don't plague me ! How should I know ?

SARAH : But you don't think so, do you ? (*Miserably, poor* MINNIE *shakes her head.*) I suppose it was wicked of me to wish. Vain and unnatural. Now I—I'm a kind of—freak.

MINNIE (*breaking out*) : Don't torment yourself, my darling ! It's not true, and, if it is, think how lucky you are ! To be your own pretty self always !

SARAH (*still following her own train of thought*) : A witch. We have new methods for burning witches. We burn their dear ones too. Minnie.

MINNIE : What is it, angel, what is it ?

SARAH : If ever you should get a letter from me—ever, do you hear ?

MINNIE : Yes, yes, dear, I hear.

SARAH : Everything in it you must treat as sacred. Not a soul must see it but you. No one else must know what's in it.

MINNIE : And what will be in it ?

SARAH : The—the truth. Will you promise ?

MINNIE : But why should you start writing me letters ? When would you have cause ?

SARAH : Probably never—but promise !

MINNIE : Of course I promise ; but let's forget all about it.

SARAH : There's just one thing more.

[*But* EDITH *and* TOM *return.*

TOM : That child adores her father !

MINNIE (*as if excusing her*) : She's very young.

EDITH : You all spoil her.

SARAH : Do you think she *is* spoiled ?

EDITH : No ; because the child has character.

SARAH (*smiling*) : You'd spoil her worse than any of us !

EDITH : I don't think I have a reputation for indulging myself or anyone else. You should be getting ready for church. It's nearly eleven.

TOM (*to* MINNIE) : And you should be getting Jane ready for her walk instead of fraying all our nerves.

[MINNIE *favours her master with one inexpressive glance, and quietly resumes her knitting.*

SARAH : You'd better go to her, Minnie.

MINNIE : Do you think he's made her cry ?

TOM : Be off, creature !

[*But the creature is off already.*

EDITH : Come, Sarah. We mustn't be late.

SARAH : I—I don't think I shall come this morning.

EDITH : Sarah !

TOM : My dear, why not ?

SARAH : I've got a headache.

EDITH : You were up too late last night.

SARAH : Perhaps that's it.

TOM (*with dubious eagerness*) : Shall I stay and keep you company ?

SARAH : No, thank you, Mr. Moonlight. Never shall it be said that a headache of mine stood between you and your slender chances of salvation.

EDITH : I think that's a little flippant, sister.

SARAH : I'm sorry, Edith dear. Good-bye. (*She kisses her.*) Look after each other.

EDITH : Good-bye.

SARAH : Good-bye, Tom.

[*She puts her face up to his.*

TOM : Good-bye, my dear.

[*He kisses her lightly, and, when he withdraws his head, lo ! hers remains.*

SARAH (*in a little voice*) : I hadn't finished, Mr. Moonlight.

TOM : I'm sorry, my dear. I'm only going to church, you know. (*But this time his kiss is as tender as hers, and as long. She turns and moves quietly towards the door, her face averted.*) Ask Minnie for the salts.

[*She halts at his voice, and answers him only with a gentle nod, her eyes still turned away.*

EDITH : I think that Minnie shouldn't be allowed to treat you as she does.

TOM : Do you dislike her ?

EDITH : Unfortunately, one may disapprove where one doesn't dislike. It's not easy to dislike Minnie. But she doesn't treat you as she should.

TOM : I agree.

EDITH : Then why don't you adopt a strong line about it ?

TOM : I do ; several times a week.

EDITH : With what result ?

TOM (*hedging for his pride's sake*) : Well, you can't expect results immediately, you know.

EDITH : Is five years immediately ?

TOM : Well, one doesn't want to force the pace. I'm not the man to treat any woman roughly, you know ; especially when she's in my employ. There are, after all, certain canons of politeness which one hesitates to transgress.

EDITH : I wonder if all men deceive themselves as much as you do, Thomas.

TOM : I ? My dear Edith, you don't know me. If I have one characteristic above others, it is

the power to look facts in the face. Besides, Minnie is indispensable to Sarah. After all, Sarah was only three when that woman came to you first as under-nurse, and Minnie was only about fifteen herself. Well, you know, one must make allowances for a long, faithful service like that. (EDITH *is still looking sceptical.*) Besides, these barbaric Scotch people aren't quite like ourselves. They're queer wild folk.

EDITH : I had never thought of Minnie as a wild barbarian before.

TOM : No. Besides, she's very fond of me really.

EDITH : Very much as the canary is fond of its cuttlefish.

TOM : Well, there are all kinds of affection, you know.

EDITH : It may be.

TOM (*slyly*) : I'm sure *you* know that as well as any of us.

EDITH : Why I ?

TOM : Well, one mustn't conclude that, because a woman remains single, her heart has never been touched.

EDITH : You would conclude instead that her head has been ?

TOM : Certainly not. I merely meant——

EDITH : It is time we started.

[*She begins to draw on her gloves ; and* TOM *fetches his from the hall, together with his hat and cane.*

TOM : I merely meant to observe that love knows no boundaries whatever ; may, indeed, pay his visits in the most unexpected places.

EDITH : That's the second backhanded compliment you have made me this morning, Thomas.

TOM (*appalled*) : My dear Edith, I was generalising ! Really, you mustn't be so sensitive.

EDITH : I'm not in the least sensitive ; but, when you're feeling vulgarly curious about me, it would pay you better not to beat about the bush.

TOM : But, Edith——

EDITH : Allow me. In your silly, indirect fashion you were attempting to discover if I have ever been in love. Why not ask me point-blank ?

TOM : I wouldn't dream of such an impertinence.

EDITH : Is it *more* impertinent that way ? You may ask your question.

TOM : I shall do nothing of the sort.

EDITH : Then I shall answer it. Yes, sir, I have been.

TOM (*involuntarily*) : Then why didn't you marry him ?

EDITH : There were many reasons. He was perhaps, after all, rather a foolish fellow.

TOM : You mean he wasn't worthy of you ? Then Sarah was wrong.

[*The words are out before he knows it.*

EDITH (*quickly*) : What was Sarah wrong about ?

TOM (*clumsily faltering*) : An argument we had. Sarah thought that you'd never married because —er—because you preferred—because no one—because you had never cared for any man sufficiently.

EDITH : Hadn't you both better leave such old maids' gossip to people like me? Put your gloves on, Thomas Moonlight.

TOM (*uneasily obeying*) : I'm afraid, Edith, I really have been impertinent. Will you forgive me my clumsiness?

EDITH : May none of us have worse than that to be forgiven, my friend. Let us go. (*He offers her his arm formally. She takes it lightly, but before going adds sternly*) And, incidentally, it wasn't I who either said or thought he wasn't worthy of me.

TOM (*generously making amends*) : No, Edith, it was I.

[*And* EDITH *sniffs again.*

EDITH : We shall be late.

[*They go. Soon after the sound of the front door closing is heard, the room door is opened silently again and* SARAH *comes back. She is dressed for going out : a coat and skirt, a bonnet, gloves. In her hands are many things, including a small basket box with strap and handle, which she sets down first. The little canvas bag she sets in her reticule, and, of two unstamped letters that she carries, one she arranges prominently on* TOM'S *writing-desk, while the other she holds irresolutely for a second or two. Coming to a decision, she goes to the door and calls.*

SARAH : Minnie!

[*There is no answer. A moment or two's thought and, changing her mind, she closes the door and leans the second letter against the mantelpiece clock. Then, taking from* TOM'S *desk the letter from her sister, she tears the address off it and shuts it carefully*

in her bag. But as an afterthought she pockets the letter too. Everything is now ready for the flight. She looks round her dear room for the last time. She does not cry, but her little face is very white and set. One or two pieces of furniture are out of position; she puts them to rights. She smooths out the cushion on TOM'S *chair. She braces herself a little. She picks up her umbrella and luggage. She goes out steadily, closing the door behind her. We hear the front door again. And that is the end of* SARAH MOONLIGHT.

ACT II

SCENE I

Seventeen years are seventeen years, and now, in 1898, this room, no less than its frequenters, looks different. But, unlike its frequenters, the changes it has undergone make it look younger instead of older than if it had not changed at all.

PERCY MIDDLING, *whom we should judge to be six or seven and twenty, sits before us ; solid, stolid, gloomy, patient. His very patience is somehow exasperating. There is no dash about him, no swing, no style. How could he ever hope ? As soon as we begin to tire of watching him, in his preoccupation, alternately undo and do up the buttons of his jacket,* MINNIE, *to our relief, joins him.* MINNIE, *it seems, bears the passage of time better than most of us.*

MINNIE : Jane is coming.

PERCY (*without animation*) : She's kept me waiting a long time, hasn't she ?

MINNIE : She's been busy, man.

PERCY (*without apparent interest*) : What doing ?

MINNIE : Reading.

PERCY : Is she near the end of her chapter ?

MINNIE : It's not a book with chapters at all.

PERCY (*quietly*) : Oh, dear.

MINNIE : It's poetry.

PERCY (*after a moment's heavy reflection*) : Do you think that means anything ?

MINNIE (*wilfully misunderstanding*) : Well, poetry doesn't, as a rule.

PERCY (*slow-witted fellow that he is*) : I have heard that people take to poetry when they are in a certain state of mind.

MINNIE : What state of mind ?

PERCY : You know—a funny state of mind.

MINNIE : And why should Jane be in a funny state of mind ?

PERCY (*after thought*) : I suppose, no reason. I was just hoping.

MINNIE : Hoping ?

PERCY : After all, it does happen to all of us, including the most unlikely ones. In fact, I don't mind telling you I'm in a very funny state of mind myself.

MINNIE : I'm not blind.

PERCY : No. I suppose not.

MINNIE : I'm sorry for you.

PERCY : I suppose you don't think there's any chance for me, do you ?

MINNIE (*cheerfully*) : I don't.

PERCY : No. I suppose not.

MINNIE : Still, she *has* been reading a lot of poetry lately.

PERCY (*pensively*) : Yes, it's queer, that.

MINNIE : Aye, I don't much like it myself. Well, I can't stop talking here. We're expecting a visitor this afternoon.

PERCY : For tea ?

MINNIE : Aye, for tea for a fortnight ; and for breakfast, dinner, and supper too. At least, if she behaves herself. (*Before she reaches the door, it opens, and* JANE *is here.*) Ah, you're here. There's that Percy Middling boy still waiting.

[*She leaves them. And* JANE *? Of course, a daughter of* SARAH'S *is very pretty.*

JANE : Good afternoon, Percy.

[*She is not effusive.*

PERCY (*rising slowly*) : Good afternoon, Jane.

JANE : We don't usually see you in the afternoon. How is it you are not at work ?

PERCY : It's Saturday, Jane.

JANE : Of course. And you don't play games. (*Really, her air of disapproval is not encouraging.*) You may sit down.

PERCY : Thank you, Jane. (*He sits down ; then adds laboriously*) As a matter of fact, I came round on a special errand to-day, Jane.

JANE : Errand ?

[*He thinks for a moment.*

PERCY : No, perhaps errand is the wrong word.

JANE (*mischievously*) : "Errand" sounds as though your father had sent you.

PERCY : To tell you the truth, I came of my own free will ; not that father would have objected.

JANE : That is very broadminded of your father.

[*But poor* PERCY *scents no irony.*

PERCY : Father, of course, really is in many ways a very excellent man.

JANE : Is that what you came round to say ?

PERCY : No ; not exactly. (*And then, for he is conscientiously truthful*) At least, I had intended to say it, lightly, during the course of our conversation.

JANE : I see.

PERCY : More particularly, I had meant to

speak, if you wouldn't mind, about you ; and about me—to a lesser extent, of course.

JANE (*kindly*) I don't think I should, Percy.

PERCY : I don't want to be obstinate, but you can hardly know what I have to say.

JANE : Can't I ? All the same, tell me some other time.

PERCY : I would rather now, Jane.

JANE : Besides, mother and father will be back soon. They are out walking.

PERCY : I shall try not to take long.

JANE : And we're expecting a guest.

PERCY : Minnie told me so.

JANE : And such an exciting one. Did she tell you who ?

PERCY : No. I don't think so. But what I wanted to say——

JANE : It's a brand-new cousin.

PERCY : You mean, a baby ?

JANE : No ; she's only a year or two younger than I. Her mother is the black sheep of our family, and they've always lived in Italy.

PERCY : I see. But what I really wanted to say——

JANE (*giving no quarter*) : For years the family would have nothing to do with her ; then gradually she and mother made it up by letter, and in April we asked if the daughter Joy could come and stay with us. At first they thought that——

PERCY : Jane, I am extremely sorry to interrupt. But if your father is coming back soon, I must say what I have to say quickly.

JANE : Isn't it fit for father to hear ?

PERCY : He has heard it already ; indeed, several times. Will you listen to me now, Jane ?

JANE : Yes, Percy ; if you wish.

[*He has long known exactly what he would say, and doggedly he begins at the beginning.*

PERCY : I dare say you think me a very foolish fellow, Jane.

JANE : I don't remember ever having told you so ?

PERCY : No. I suppose not. Yet I guess it. On the other hand, I was not, in fact, below the average at school. Indeed, I ended up in the sixth.

JANE (*gently*) : Did you, Percy ?

PERCY : That is to say, the lower sixth, not the upper sixth. But if I'd stayed at school long enough, who knows what might not have happened ?

JANE : Who, indeed ?

PERCY : It is true, of course, that I failed three times to secure a mathematical scholarship at Cambridge. But, once there, I managed by dint of hard work to obtain a decent degree ; not a first, of course.

JANE (*helping him*) : Still, even a second seems to me wonderful.

PERCY : I got a third. I was never any good at games, but that doesn't mean I'm not a perfectly healthy person. Of course, I've had the usual things—measles, chicken-pox, and whooping-cough—but one can't blame a man for that.

JANE : Indeed not.

PERCY : Then as to my present position. Engineering is quite a respectable occupation, I think you would agree.

JANE : *I* have nothing particular against engineers.

PERCY : And the firm, it is only fair to say, is a universally respected, well-established, and old one ; so old, indeed, that many good judges consider it has seen its best days. I shouldn't go so far as that myself. Furthermore, my father, who, as I said, is really a very excellent man, would be regarded by many people as being, so to speak, in a very comfortable position. I should perhaps add that father and I have always been on the very best of terms. Before saying any more——

JANE : Percy.

PERCY : Yes, Jane ?

JANE : Are you trying to say you want me to marry you ?

PERCY : I was coming to that a little later.

JANE : Have you prepared all this ?

PERCY : Well, I had thought it all over carefully—except the bit about marrying me. I thought I'd leave that bit to the passion of the moment.

JANE : May I advise you, Percy—for the next time ?

PERCY : For the next time ? Have I got to do this often ?

JANE : Next time you want a girl to marry you, just say, " Jane, I love you " ; unless, of course, her name is Mary.

PERCY (*after a long pause*) : Is it—is it no good, then ?

JANE : I'm afraid not, Percy.

PERCY : Because of the way I set about it ?

JANE : No, not because of that. You see, I don't love you.

PERCY : You mustn't think, Jane, because I didn't say so, that *I* don't love *you.* I do, and I always shall ; always, Jane. I thought perhaps you already knew that.

JANE : So I did. I hoped you'd learn not to. Are you very disappointed ?

PERCY (*after reflection*) : No. You see, women often change their minds, and I shall ask you again later from time to time.

JANE : Poor Percy, do you think that will really make a difference ?

[*He reflects again.*

PERCY : No. I suppose not. (*He lifts up his head.*) I thought I heard the front door.

JANE : I think you did. I expect they've come back.

PERCY : I believe I'd rather not wait. (*He ponders on this a moment as at a strange discovery.*) Good-bye, Jane.

[*He offers his hand.*

JANE (*shaking it*) : Good-bye, Percy. And thank you ever so much.

[*When he is gone, we can hear the sound of voices outside, male voices raised in greeting. Then, when it has subsided,* WILLIE RAGG *comes in. Now, except in respect of age,* WILLIE RAGG *is clearly a very different young man ; debonair, light-hearted,*

quick-witted, dashing, and man-of-the-world. That much JANE *is quite old enough to appreciate. Marking her eye, we are not slow to perceive, nor indeed to share, her opinion. Closing the door behind him, the amusing fellow strikes a histrionic attitude and declaims.*

WILLIE : Willie is back !

JANE : Oh, Willie !

WILLIE : Willie left his little Jane,
But Willie soon came back again !

JANE : Oh, Willie !

WILLIE : I made that up on my way from the station. I said to my cabby, " Cabby, what rhymes with Jane ? " And he said, " Pain." So I left him and took another cab. (*Suddenly sober*) Jane, you haven't kissed me !

JANE : You haven't asked me.

WILLIE (*the Lothario*) : Most girls wouldn't wait to be asked.

JANE : Then I'm not like most girls.

WILLIE : None of them are.

JANE (*a finger raised in mock warning*) : Now, don't you start throwing your triumphs in my face again, Willie Ragg. Remember, last time you made me cry.

WILLIE : Shall a fellow ever forget ? It was the proudest moment of my life.

JANE : Well, it won't be repeated.

WILLIE (*holding out his hand deferentially*) : Please, Miss Moonlight, may I kiss you ?

JANE : Yes, you may ; twice. (*And so they kiss—twice.*) Dear Willie. Where have you been ?

WILLIE : I've been to Newmarket inspecting my horse.

JANE : What horse ?

WILLIE : This afternoon I bought a racehorse ; at least a quarter share in one. Georgie Greenaway has a half share and Arthur the other quarter. To-day I went down to choose my quarter. Aren't you pleased ?

JANE (*not very eager*) : Of course I am ; but, Willie dear, you know you can't afford it.

WILLIE (*laying a finger along his nose*) : I can.

JANE (*very eager*) : Have you got that job ?

WILLIE : No, but I probably shall. I've got better than a job ; I've got the spondulicks, the real yellow ready itself.

JANE : But how ?

WILLIE : Charm of manner.

JANE : A gift ?

WILLIE : Not exactly ; more a loan.

JANE : Oh, Willie !

[*Her face falls.*

WILLIE : That's nothing to worry about, my dear.

JANE : But I *am* worried. Somebody's asked me to marry them.

WILLIE : Them ?

JANE : Him.

WILLIE : What did you say ?

JANE : I refused, of course.

WILLIE : Well, that's all right, isn't it ? Unless, of course, you wanted to.

JANE : You know I didn't want to. You know I don't want to marry anyone but you.

WILLIE : Was it that Percy Middling ?

JANE : Yes. (*No man with a sense of humour could help laughing aloud, and* WILLIE RAGG *certainly has a sense of humour.*) It's no good laughing. Mother will be very upset ; so will father.

WILLIE (*still amused*) : But do they *like* him ?

JANE : They think he's a good match. And they think you're a very bad one.

WILLIE : And so I am. But, after all, you're old enough to know your mind, and we're living on the edge of the twentieth century.

JANE : That's what I said.

WILLIE : What did they answer to that ?

JANE : Mother said that she saw insufficient evidence at present to show that in the twentieth century people could be nourished without food.

WILLIE : Utter nonsense !

JANE : She also said something about a reasonably good character.

WILLIE : Well, that was decent of her, anyhow.

JANE : And regretted that you hadn't one.

WILLIE : I hate to say anything against your people, Jane, but they can never forget that a fellow has had the bad luck to lose two or three jobs——

JANE : Three or four.

WILLIE : Well, three or four ; and, above all, was sacked from Harrow.

JANE : They certainly don't much care for the last part.

WILLIE : I can't understand that point of view.

JANE : I often tell them what you say—that

no self-respecting boy of average spirit could decently *omit* to be sacked from Harrow. But mother only sniffs.

WILLIE : Anyway, I'm going to marry you just the same. Nothing shall stop us.

JANE : I don't think anything can. We love each other so much.

WILLIE : And we'll announce it to your people to-night.

JANE (*seriously*) : There's just one thing.

WILLIE (*pulled up*) : What's that ?

JANE : I've been meaning to tell you for some days. You ought to know. There's—there's suicide in our family, at least, one suicide—my mother.

WILLIE : Your mother ?

JANE : Yes, father's first wife was my real mother ; and she didn't die naturally. They told me when I was twenty-one.

WILLIE : I'd never heard. Why did she do it ?

JANE : Nobody knows. She just slipped away one morning, and left a letter for father saying she was going to do it, but it was no use looking for her. She didn't say why or anything.

WILLIE : But what did they think was at the bottom of it ?

JANE : I've never been told very much about it. I think she had some kind of obsession, something about her looks, that preyed on her mind. She'd been a little hysterical that morning.

WILLIE : Was her—was she never found ?

JANE : No. Of course, they did everything they could to find her, but they couldn't. They even

asked her sister in Italy—that was how the reconciliation began—but she could tell us nothing. It—it doesn't make any difference, does it ?

[*The sound of that front door again.*

WILLIE (*kissing her*) : You shall see if it does. Wait.

[*When they have waited a moment or two,* TOM *and* EDITH *come in. Certainly* TOM *doesn't look his sixty-one years, or, if he does, it's a handsome sixty-one, with its touch of white about the hair : and* EDITH, *a little plumper and softer, is at fifty-five perhaps all the better for her extra years. They halt a little at the sight of* WILLIE ; WILLIE *erect and appropriately, defiantly arranged behind* JANE'S *chair. Their greeting is not effusive.*

TOM : Oh, I thought you were alone, Jane.

WILLIE : Good afternoon, Mrs. Moonlight.

EDITH : Good afternoon.

WILLIE : Good afternoon, sir.

TOM : How do you do ?

WILLIE : I should like, if you will allow me, sir, to have a word with you.

TOM : Alone ?

JANE : No, I shall stay, Willie.

EDITH : Does it concern Jane ?

WILLIE : Very closely, ma'am.

EDITH : I shall stay, Tom.

TOM : As you please, my dear.

WILLIE (*a little abashed*) : Well—although a fellow doesn't want to risk being discourteous——

EDITH : Don't risk it, young man.

WILLIE : Very well. I wish to ask formally your permission to my marriage with your daughter.

EDITH : *Do* you.

TOM : Have you asked Jane ?

WILLIE : I have. And she was good enough to consent.

EDITH : The girl's lost her senses.

WILLIE : Am I to understand from that that you regard the match without enthusiasm ?

EDITH : I regard it as a bad joke.

JANE : Mother !

WILLIE : Do you share that view, sir ?

TOM (*more gently*) : Well, my friend, Mrs. Moonlight may perhaps express herself with undue emphasis, but my own view is substantially the same. I don't want to be intolerant, but we must be practical. Have you any money ?

WILLIE : I will be quite frank with you. No ; at the moment I have not.

EDITH : At what moment precisely are you likely to have some ?

WILLIE : That is not a question one can answer very exactly. But I suppose I have prospects no less than the next man.

EDITH : What are they ?

WILLIE : Well, they are a little difficult to define ; though only to-day I acquired a share in—er——

EDITH : Yes ?

WILLIE : In—er—a very promising racehorse.

EDITH : I see. And, of course, you might always win the Calcutta Sweep.

JANE : Willie means to get a job.

EDITH : Does anyone mean to give him one ?

TOM : We mustn't be too hard, my dear. It isn't necessary, provided these two young people clearly understand that a marriage between them is quite impossible.

WILLIE : Am I to gather then, sir, that you definitely refuse your consent ?

TOM : I'm afraid, quite definitely.

EDITH : Are you surprised ?

WILLIE : Again at the risk of seeming discourteous, not in the least.

TOM (*puffing relief*) : Good. Then the interview is over. You will stay to tea ? We are expecting a visitor.

WILLIE : Thank you, sir. I should be glad to stay to tea, but the interview, I'm afraid, is not quite over. I must point out that, though I regret your disapproval exceedingly, I feel it would not be right to let that stand in the way of our happiness. You agree, Jane ?

JANE : Yes, Willie.

WILLIE : We regard our engagement, therefore, as still valid.

TOM : The devil you do ! You listen to me, young man——

EDITH : Tom, let us be quite calm. Jane, my dear, I'm sorry you should have acquired this unworthy infatuation, but I will do all I can to help you get over it.

JANE : It's no good, mother. We regard ourselves as engaged.

EDITH : You may regard yourselves as you wish. But nothing can come of it.

TOM : Nothing *shall* come of it. I will trouble you, sir, not to visit this house in the future.

EDITH : My advice, Tom, is to encourage his visits, not to prevent them. I think you will find that more effective.

JANE : Mother, how could you be so unkind !

EDITH : Would you prefer that he did not come ?

JANE : No, but——

WILLIE : Without complaining of the very shabby treatment——

TOM : Shabby treatment be damned ! If I had my way—— (*But the door opens, and* MINNIE *is there.*)

MINNIE (*in a strange low voice*) : Your visitor is here.

[*They all rise, and for a moment or two wait in silence. When* JOY *eventually comes in, those of us who have seen* SARAH MOONLIGHT *cannot avoid a shiver at the resemblance. There she stands shyly—almost, one might think, a little stunned. If one did not know there was no reason for it, one might almost imagine, from that slight swaying, that she is about to faint. Eventually* EDITH *breaks the silence.*

EDITH : How are you, my dear ?

[*She kisses her.*

JOY : Very well, thank you.

[*It is almost as if she were in a trance.*

TOM (*bracing himself at length, and shaking hands*) : I'm very glad to see you.

[*But somehow the strange girl can't answer him.*

EDITH : This is my daughter, Jane.

JANE (*warmly*) : I've been so looking forward to your coming.

[*She too shakes an unresponsive hand. Yet the visitor still is dumb.*

EDITH : And this is Mr. William Ragg. My niece, Joy.

WILLIE (*beaming his admiration*) : Delighted, I'm sure.

[*And him she doesn't even see. For she cannot move her strange, disquieting glance from Jane.*

EDITH (*making another effort towards normality*) : Well now, my dear, what about tea ? Tea, I think, Minnie.

[*As though her legs were too weak for their weight,* JOY, *feeling for the chair behind her, slowly sits.*

And then the curtain falls.

SCENE 2

On her accustomed perch, three weeks later, MINNIE *is still knitting, when* JOY *joins her.*

JOY : You've packed everything, Minnie ?

MINNIE : Of course I have. Doesn't your train go at 3.20 ?

JOY : Yes. My horrid train.

MINNIE : There now ; you'll enjoy yourself again.

JOY : Yes. It's funny ; we can always do that. No hurt hurts always. But what a sweet three weeks to leave behind !

MINNIE : You'll come again.

JOY : After another twenty years ?

MINNIE : Away with you ! Long before.

JOY : I'm not sure. What's the use ?

MINNIE : To see us all.

JOY : To see you all growing old without me? To feel—left behind?

MINNIE : There's no leaving behind. You're older in yourself, too.

JOY : Yes, in myself. That's one of my little troubles. People make love to me, Minnie. They've been doing it now for thirty years; and in just the same way. I can hardly listen politely.

MINNIE : If that's your only trouble, you're a lucky girl.

JOY : Indeed, I would be. There are other things, though. My disappearances, for instance. I've had to disappear twice since I left you. People begin to wonder after a few years; so, like poor Joe, I have to keep—moving on. Seven years in Florence I was; then eight years in Paris. Now I'm in Vienna.

MINNIE (*not allowing herself to condole*) : Some of us would like the change.

JOY : That kind of change is not much help. *I* don't change; my work doesn't change. Once I used to love playing. Now a piano merely means something to make a little money with.

MINNIE : Only a little?

JOY : No, quite a lot; counting pupils.

MINNIE : Who's this new music-master you're off to meet in Paris?

JOY : It isn't a music-master at all really. It's a man who is going to arrange some concerts for me.

MINNIE : You oughtn't to have to work.

JOY : I'm glad I do. What else should I think about ?

MINNIE (*breaking out*) : Oh, why did you ever go ? Why did you ?

JOY : I told you in my letter.

MINNIE : I know, but you *needn't* have gone. I still don't understand.

JOY : *I* understand. For years I'd had this fear, this growing fear, day and night. It hardly ever left me, and it got worse and worse. Then suddenly that morning I couldn't bear it any longer. I felt ill, sick with fear, horror at my own freakishness. I only wanted to get away—anywhere—to hide, so that no one should suffer through me, to get away before the world found me out for what I was : a freak. If you like, it was madness, hysteria, panic. I suppose it was. But look at me now. (MINNIE *looks*.) Can you say it was a delusion ? Do I look as old as my own daughter ?

MINNIE : No.

JOY : Then can you say I was wrong ? (MINNIE *shakes her head*.) There ; let's talk no more about it.

MINNIE : Have you lots of friends ?

JOY : Yes ; temporary friends. Every now and again I go and pay Maud a secret visit in Florence. They know all about it and are kind to me. Joy's a nice girl, but delicate. Of course, she's not like Jane.

MINNIE : So you're pleased with your Jane ?

JOY : Oh, Minnie dear !

MINNIE : Well ?

JOY : *So* pleased, *so* pleased. I've dreamed about her so much, especially since she was grown up. I wanted to see her more than anything else in the world ; so, when the chance came, I just couldn't keep away any longer. Minnie, tell me truly : do you think she likes me ?

MINNIE : She adores you. I'd box her ears if she didn't.

JOY : Darling Minnie ! I wish I could take you with me.

MINNIE : No, I must stay and look after them here. That Tom Moonlight, for instance, would be in a pretty way without me.

JOY (*half to herself*) : That Tom Moonlight.

[*She covers her eyes with a hand. And then* JANE *comes in.*

JANE : Oh, Joy, I've been looking for you.

JOY : I haven't been far.

JANE : I want to speak to you about something very important before you go.

JOY : What is it ? Come and sit down.

JANE : It's rather private. Minnie dear, will you leave us alone ? (MINNIE *collects her chattels.*) Keep a look-out for Percy, and tell me when he's here. He's coming round to say good-bye to Joy.

MINNIE : I will.

[*She goes.*

JOY (*making room for* JANE *beside her*) : Now, what is it ?

JANE : Well, it's about Willie. I want you to help me.

JOY : My dear, how can I help you ?

JANE : Talk to father.

JOY : You think he'd listen to any stray niece who walks in with a pocketful of advice ?

JANE : But he's mad about you. Can't you see that ? He talks about you night and day. I can't understand it.

JOY : That's not very polite.

JANE : Oh, you know I like you awfully too. I simply hate your going. I wish you could stay with us always.

JOY : I know you do.

JANE : But father—I've never seen him like this. And mother too. He says you remind him of my real mother ; you know, his first wife.

JOY : Yes.

[*She turns her eyes away.*

JANE : That's why I think he might take some notice of you. Couldn't you, before you go, just tell him what you think of Willie ?

JOY : Are you sure you'd like me to ?

JANE : Yes : why not ?

JOY : Because, you see, what I think of Willie is really very much what Uncle Tom thinks of Willie.

JANE : Joy !

JOY : I'm so sorry. But you'd rather I told the truth ?

JANE : Yes, but can't you see what Willie really is ?

JOY : I'm afraid I can, my dear. I've been worried that you can't. Now, Percy Middling——

JANE (*contemptuously*) : Percy !

JOY : Percy has some very solid qualities.

JANE : So solid that it's quite painful to come into contact with them.

JOY : He'd make a good husband.

JANE : Then I shall be unselfish. He can make one for someone else. Really, Joy, I thought you at least would be on my side.

JOY : My dear, I *am* on your side.

JANE : That's what mother says. But middle-aged people have really forgotten what love is.

JOY : Not always, Jane. I've not forgotten.

JANE : You're not old enough to have forgotten yet. But perhaps you've never known.

JOY : You're very disappointed in me ?

JANE : No, not very. I thought you'd understand ; that's all.

[*But when* WILLIE RAGG *comes in at this moment, it is quite clear that they are disappointed, both of them.*

WILLIE : Ladies, your servant.

JANE : Oh, Willie, I'm so glad you've come.

[*Is it only to our imagination that his kiss is more perfunctory than hers ?*

WILLIE (*a shade proprietary*) : My nice Jenny.

JOY : Good afternoon, Mr. Ragg. You're only just in time to see me. I'm off in half an hour, you know.

WILLIE : I knew. That's why I came. And to

see my Jenny, of course. When are you coming back to us? Make it soon.

JOY (*really almost arch, she is*): Don't you dare to be polite to me, Mr. Ragg. You've got your Jenny and you wouldn't even notice if you never saw me again.

WILLIE: On the contrary, I have almost come to regard you, during these last three weeks, as an essential corner of a very happy triangle.

JANE (*with good-natured irony*): Indeed, I don't know what our engagement would have been without you.

JOY: Three is not usually regarded as the ideal number for an engagement.

JANE (*unable to help it*): But, to the best of my knowledge, Willie has never been engaged to more than one of us.

JOY (*with a glance at* WILLIE): I have never forgotten it.

WILLIE: And why should you? After all, I can only be one of countless admirers.

JANE (*her good humour restored*): Willie, you carry politeness to a pitch that would terrify the most trusting fiancée. No wonder every woman loves you.

WILLIE: My dear, if politeness were the only reason for my success, I couldn't begin to compete against, say, an efficient head waiter.

JOY: Have you ever had to?

[*But* WILLIE *is not so easily trapped.*

WILLIE (*to* JANE): M'lud, must I answer that question?

JOY : Certainly.

WILLIE : Then the case should be heard *in camera.*

JANE : The case shall be dismissed ; the judge is bored with it.

WILLIE : What a very good reason ! And brand new.

JANE : The next case up for hearing is about Monday's tickets. Have you got them ?

WILLIE : What tickets, darling ?

JANE : Oh, Willie, your memory ! Aren't you going to take mother and me to the horse-show ? Or have you changed your mind ?

WILLIE : Oh, that ? No, of course, I remember. Yes, I wrote for tickets. They're probably waiting for me at home.

JANE : Mother wanted to know. (*To* JOY) I wish you could have come too.

JOY : I shall be in Paris, very sorry for myself.

JANE : I'd love to go to Paris.

JOY : It's a lonely city.

WILLIE : But you won't be alone ?

JOY : No, Mr. Ragg. I'm afraid I have some friends there. I'm staying with them.

JANE : Afraid ? Nasty friends ?

JOY : Fairly nasty.

[MINNIE *opens the door.*

MINNIE (*her eye falling on* WILLIE) : Oh, *you're* here. (*To* JANE) That lad's come—that Percy Middling.

JANE : Where is he ?

MINNIE : He's got your father and mother cornered in the study again.

JANE (*spurred to action*) : Oh, dear, how long has he been here ? What's he talking about ?

MINNIE : What does he usually talk about ?

JANE : Willie, excuse me.

[*And, followed by* MINNIE, *she hurries away.*

JOY : Mr. Middling is persistent.

WILLIE : May I sit beside you ?

JOY : Certainly—why ?

WILLIE : Why does a fellow ever want to sit beside a pretty woman ?

JOY : I've never thought the problem out, Mr. Ragg.

WILLIE : Let's think it out together. In the first place, we'll never solve it if you persist in calling me Mr. Ragg.

JOY : How do you know I want to solve it, Mr. Ragg ?

WILLIE : Until you call me Willie, I shall know that you *don't* want to ; are, in fact, afraid to.

JOY : I'm never afraid—Willie.

WILLIE : Then in that case I need not be afraid of solving this problem for you.

[*He moves nearer, his arm resting along the back of the couch behind her ; but she does not retreat.*

JOY : During the judge's temporary absence on private business, the prisoner proceeds to flirt with his prosecuting counsel.

WILLIE : If counsel always looked like you, the dock would be the most popular spot in London.

JOY : As polite as ever, O ideal prisoner.

WILLIE : Involuntary, Joy. My prosecuting counsel has such a very pretty nose.

[*And then, before ever we or she know it has happened, he is kissing her.*

JOY (*unflustered*) : Why did you do that ?

WILLIE : I don't know, but it was worth it. Are you very angry ?

JOY : No ; at least, I don't know yet. Have you forgotten Jane ?

WILLIE : No, of course, I haven't forgotten Jane. I adore Jane. You don't meet people like my Jenny every day. Jane's an angel. Jane——

JOY : I think I'm a little confused.

WILLIE : Well, what I mean is, one doesn't meet people like you every day either. The fact is—er—you're an angel too.

JOY : I see. And whenever you meet an angel, you must treat her accordingly ?

WILLIE : Exactly.

JOY : You'll have a busy time in heaven, won't you ?

WILLIE : Now, don't make fun of a fellow. I thought you were the kind to understand.

JOY : I think I do understand. I merely wanted to make sure of where you stand with Jane. Stands Willie where he did ?

WILLIE (*airily*) : Yes, roughly—yes. You see, already I've come to regard Jane almost exactly as my wife.

JOY (*with polite interest*) : So you have a wife, too ?

WILLIE : No, of course not. But I mean Jane soon will be.

JOY : And that seems to you a good and sufficient reason for kissing me ?

WILLIE : Well, hang it all, she's not my wife *yet*. And a fellow's not a bally monk.

JOY : Now I come to think of it, I don't believe a fellow is.

WILLIE : If there's one thing I dislike, it is sarcasm. I'd much rather you flared up and boxed my ears. I'd know where I was then.

JOY (*more gently*) : Not if *I* boxed them.

WILLIE : Well, I wish you had. As I say, I thought you'd understand. But, as you disliked it, I can only say I'm sorry.

JOY (*surprisingly*) : I didn't say I disliked it.

[*In a flash his expression of offended, sulky dignity vanishes.*

WILLIE (*quietly, eagerly*) : What does that mean ?

JOY : It doesn't mean that you may sit beside me again.

WILLIE : But, Joy, *did* you dislike it ?

JOY (*shaking her head prettily*) : Not very much.

WILLIE (*exploding*) : Oh, and to think that you're going abroad for good in half an hour !

JOY : But Jane ?

WILLIE : Jane's different. My love for her is more settled—quite different. I wouldn't hurt her or lose her for anything, but nor could I resist you, Joy. A fellow's not putting it very well, but if you could be, so to speak, the last memory of my bachelordom, I could get married without any regrets.

JOY (*unable to resist it*) : Oh, Willie, you do say the most beautiful things to me ! Still, there it is : I'm off in half an hour.

WILLIE (*suddenly*) : I shall follow you.

JOY : You'll miss me. Paris is a large place.

WILLIE : I should find you, even without an address.

JOY : Then I needn't give you one.

WILLIE : You needn't. But it would save trouble. Will you ?

JOY : I don't know.

WILLIE : We could have such fun there. A fellow loves Paris. Now, *numero* what ?

JOY : Numero—quatre-vingt-deux.

WILLIE : And the rest ?

JOY : Mind, I don't promise to see you.

WILLIE : You needn't promise. I'd much rather you saw me than promised to. Quatre-vingt deux ?

JOY : Rue—rue d'Algers. My friends are called—Picard.

WILLIE : Quatre-vingt deux, rue d'Algers ; chez Mme Picard. That's jolly. Now listen. You're leaving by the 3.20. I shan't be able to follow before—well——

[*But further plans are interrupted by the return of* JANE *with* PERCY.

JANE : Percy's come to say good-bye.

WILLIE (*with patronising heartiness*) : That's right. Shake hands with the lady, Percy.

PERCY : I was going to.

[*He does so.*

JOY : It was so kind of you to come round.

PERCY : Well, I don't live far away, you know.

JOY : Still, there must be heaps of more amusing ways of spending an afternoon.

PERCY : Not for me, I assure you. You see, the office is closed on Saturday.

WILLIE : In fact, you didn't know what in the world to do with yourself.

PERCY (*reflectively*) : No, I suppose not.

JANE : Willie, you're not to tease.

WILLIE : I, my dear ? I shouldn't dare. Oh, Jenny, I've got to make a confession.

JANE : What is it ?

WILLIE : I won't be able to take you and your mother to the horse-show after all.

JANE : Oh, Willie !

WILLIE : I'm devilish sorry, but I've got to leave London, and probably won't be back. I forgot all about it.

JANE : But *must* you leave London ?

WILLIE : I can't get out of it. You see, it's business.

JANE : But you haven't any business.

WILLIE (*hurt*) : Jane, please.

JANE : Well, you don't call a quarter of a horse business ?

WILLIE : I sincerely trust it will be very good business. I've got to see about entering him for a race, and it will be too late if I leave it.

JANE : Why can't Georgie Greenaway do it ?

WILLIE : Georgie's ill, and Arthur's quite incapable.

JANE : Oh, but, Willie, I was so looking forward to it.

WILLIE : My dear, I'm much more disappointed than you. Anyway, I'll send you the tickets, and perhaps your father will use mine. Say I'm forgiven.

JANE : Of course you are.

[*She presses his hand warmly.*

WILLIE : My nice Jenny. Well, I must go and see about it. Good-bye, Joy. Best of luck and *bon voyage.*

JOY : Good-bye. And *bon voyage* to you too. (*To* JANE *innocently*) : Isn't it funny ? Mr. Ragg has to go to Paris too.

[*And the colour drains from poor Jane's face.*

JANE : Paris ? Willie, for business ?

WILLIE (*not quite at ease*) : Yes, my dear. After all, people *do* do business in Paris.

JANE : But you said it was your racehorse ?

WILLIE : I know. It's to do with Longchamps. Our trainer thought it might do some good there.

JANE (*mistress of herself by now*) : I see.

WILLIE : That's right. Now, what would you like me to bring you back as a surprise ?

JANE : Nothing, Willie. I don't think I like surprises.

WILLIE : Well, we'll see. Good-bye, Percy.

PERCY : Good-bye.

WILLIE : Good-bye, Jenny. (*He goes to kiss her, and quietly she submits to his embrace.*)

Willie must leave his little Jane,
But Willie will soon be back again.

Good-bye, everybody. Good-bye. Good-bye.

[*He is gone. There is a long, oppressive silence.* PERCY *eventually attempts to restore the atmosphere to normal.*

PERCY : I have heard that when the weather is bad in London it is often quite good in the Channel.

[*But his information is unheeded, while* JOY'S *eyes follow* JANE *solicitously as she moves, fidgeting, about the room.*

JOY (*at length, and how her voice yearns*) : Jane. (*But* JANE *is preoccupied.*) Jane, come and sit here.

JANE (*carelessly*) : No. (*Then her mind is made up.*) Percy, will you do something for me ?

PERCY : Of course I will, Jane.

JANE : You know where Willie's rooms are ?

PERCY : Yes, Jane.

JANE : Then will you give him this ?

[*This is something she has been tugging off the third finger of her left hand.*

PERCY : Yes, Jane. Why ?

[*And now* JANE *makes her big effort.*

JANE : Percy, do you—do you still want to marry me ?

PERCY : Why, of course, Jane.

JANE : Then you may ask Willie to congratulate you.

PERCY (*after a long moment of incomprehension*) : But Jane, I don't understand. Do you mean——

JANE (*her voice on a strange, strained note*) : Never

mind. Don't try to understand now. Just go and do what I ask.

PERCY : But, Jane——

JANE (*almost frantic*) : Oh, do go—please go !

PERCY : Very well, Jane.

[*And he goes. As soon as the door closes,* JANE'S *self-control gives way and she sobs bitterly. For a second or two* JOY *hesitates to comfort her, mistrusting the attempt. But she cannot restrain herself for long. Her arms about her, she pours out the soothing sounds and words of a mother to a hurt child.*

JOY : There, there, my darling. Don't fret ; don't you fret. You must be brave. He's not worth it.

[*But* JANE *tears herself away.*

JANE : Don't touch me ! How dare you ? He's not worth it, isn't he ? But you wanted him, didn't you—worth it or not ! And I was too big a fool to see it.

JOY : Jane——

JANE : Don't talk to me. I hate you. Do you hear ? I hate you.

[TOM MOONLIGHT *and* EDITH, *as they open the door, stand amazed at this outburst, and glance enquiringly at* JOY.

EDITH : Jane, what are you saying ?

JANE (*turning on them*) : Why does she want to come here to spoil my life ?

TOM (*in mild protest*) : Jane, dear, what do you mean ?

JANE : I mean that I've just broken off my engagement and I'm going to marry Percy. Now are you all satisfied ? I shall be unhappy all my life. She wanted Willie, and she's got him. She's going to Paris with him like a common—a—— (*But the tears well up again, and she buries her face, sobbing, in* EDITH'S *shoulder.*) I shall be unhappy all my life. I shall be unhappy all my life.

EDITH : No, dear, you won't. It will be all right soon, quite all right. Joy doesn't want your Willie Ragg. You've made some mistake.

JANE (*through her sobs*) : No, I haven't—I haven't. Take me away from her, please.

EDITH : Of course, darling. You shall lie down and have a nice rest. A nice rest. A nice rest.

[*And, crooning, she leads her away. A silence follows.*

JOY (*as though emerging by an effort from a stupor*) : I must be careful not to miss my train.

TOM : You're not late. Aunt Edith and I are coming to the station with you ; and I told them to whistle for a cab at three o'clock.

[*She seems not to hear.*

JOY (*recalling herself*) : I beg your pardon ?

TOM : I say I told them to whistle for a cab at three o'clock.

JOY : Are you disgusted with me—Uncle Tom ?

TOM : My child, I don't even know the facts.

JOY : Jane told you fairly. I've stolen her young man.

TOM : But—but why did she think you were going to Paris with him ?

JOY : I wanted her to think so.

TOM : *Wanted* her to ?

JOY : So that she should give him up.

TOM (*with the first hint of harshness in his voice*) : And the field be clear for you ?

JOY (*a little listless*) : I didn't want him. I'd rather have Jane's love than his.

TOM : Then why ?

JOY : You were against the marriage ?

TOM : Yes ; certainly *I* was. I thought they would never be happy.

JOY : So did I.

TOM : But really, my dear, I'm her father.

JOY : Yes, Uncle Tom.

TOM : And this talk about Paris ?

JOY : Mr. Ragg wanted to follow me and meet me there. I didn't forbid him.

TOM : Joy !

JOY : I wouldn't have met him. I gave him the wrong address—a made-up one. I wanted Jane to see what he was really like.

TOM : But, my dear, why should you go to all this elaborate trouble for us ?

JOY (*her voice a little tired*) : Don't ask me any more questions, please, Uncle Tom.

TOM : Very well, my dear.

JOY : When Jane has got over this, will you tell her what I've told you ?

TOM : Of course I will.

JOY : Promise ?

TOM : Promise.

JOY : Uncle Tom, are you very happy ?

TOM : Very, my dear. Why ?

JOY : I knew you were really. I just wanted to hear you say so.

TOM (*meaning it*) : What a strange, strange girl it is.

[*The small voice of a small clock strikes three.*

JOY : I don't want to go back. Oh, I don't want to go back.

TOM : I don't want you to. Your mother must let you come back again.

JOY (*meaninglessly*) : Yes.

TOM : Hadn't you better put your hat and coat on ? That was three.

JOY : Yes, Uncle Tom.

[*She stares at him for a moment ; then, going to him, gently, gravely winds her arms about his neck while his forehead puckers at the unexpectedness of her fond, sad kisses. Bewildered slightly, he none the less pats her shoulders with avuncular encouragement; until, forgetting their relationship, he kisses and caresses her very much as he might have done the first* MRS. MOONLIGHT. *Then we hear that shrill cab-whistle being blown outside ; and* JOY *hears it too, and clutches her* UNCLE TOM *all the tighter.*

ACT III

October 3rd, 1928. Thirty years have brought electric light, central heating, a vogue for coloured distemper, and much else that has transformed this old room. But flesh and blood still remains impervious to all attempts at rejuvenation. MINNIE, *though she must be eighty-six, still sits knitting on her accustomed perch, and we politely try not to notice that her feet are still farther from the ground, since she has definitely shrunk a little. We perceive that* JANE, *who is writing letters at her father's old desk, has grown into a jolly, rather fashionable, middle-aged woman. About* PERCY *we can form no conclusions, save that he is presumably nearing sixty, for he is almost hidden by his evening paper. We gather that dinner has not long been finished. As nine o'clock strikes,* PERCY *sets aside his "Evening Standard."*

PERCY : Ragg ought to be here soon.

MINNIE (*grunting*) : The good-for-nothing ! What do yon think he wants ?

PERCY : I was busy at the office when he rang me up, and couldn't wait to ask.

MINNIE : He's up to no good, I'll be bound.

PERCY (*who has not lost his habit of thinking before he speaks*) : No. I suppose not.

JANE : I wish you hadn't asked him round, darling.

PERCY : He asked himself. Besides, I like him. So do you.

JANE : I know. It's only laziness. I can't be bothered to get out my party face.

PERCY (*resuming his paper*) : It seems to me, if your present face is good enough for your husband, it ought to be good enough for him.

JANE : It's *too* good for him. My party face is

only my second-best. I reserve my best for you. (*But* PERCY, *who is reading again, and can't do two things at once, fails to respond.*) Darling, are you cross?

PERCY (*in absent-minded interrogation*) : Mm ?

JANE : Are you cross, angel ?

[*She goes and fondles a strand of his thinning hair.*

PERCY : No, of course I'm not cross. I hope I'm never cross.

MINNIE (*as she knits*) : You may hope !

PERCY (*mildly*) : But, please, dear, don't ruffle my hair before Ragg comes. His hair is always so very tidy.

JANE : Oh, dear, I wish I could stop loving you.

PERCY : My dear, I don't know *what* you're talking about.

JANE : You once swore that *you'd* love *me* always.

PERCY : I know. And a promise is a promise. I've never broken my word yet. What do you want me to do ?

JANE : Nothing at all but what you do do. Just continue to be your own sweet, slow-witted, idiotic, adorable self.

MINNIE : He'll do that all right.

JANE : And you mustn't be puzzled if once every twelve months your middle-aged but rather attractive wife allows herself the luxury of telling you she loves you.

MINNIE : How can he help but be puzzled ?

JANE : Minnie, I shall push you off your perch.

MINNIE : Only last week I was saying to that Tom Moonlight, " It's a wonder to me," I said, " that that Percy Middling boy isn't choked with love. His digestion must be tougher than it looks."

JANE : Then in the future I shan't let him show you his digestion.

[" *That* PERCY MIDDLING *boy" re-emerges from his paper.*

PERCY : Where's Peter to-night ?

JANE : He's dining at his club. He's going on to a supper-party later, but he's coming back to change first.

[*The front door bell is heard ; it is an electric bell now.*

JANE : That's Willie.

MINNIE : Ah, the good-for-nothing.

JANE : You said that before.

MINNIE : Very likely, but the man aggravates me. If I was a woman that spoke my mind, he'd hear something.

PERCY : He's never done you any harm ?

MINNIE : He ought to have married Jane.

JANE : But you didn't want him to ?

MINNIE : Was that what stopped him ? He didn't treat you right, and now, when he comes mashing in here, with his eye-glass in his eye, like a down-at-heel lord, it makes me very bad-tempered.

PERCY : Be quiet, Minnie ; he'll hear you.

[*For* WILLIE'S *voice is audible in the hall.* PERCY *goes out to meet him.*

JANE (*merrily*) : That eye-glass ! I'll have a bet with you, Minnie ; which eye do you think it will be in to-day ?

MINNIE : The left.

JANE : I say the right. Sixpence ?

MINNIE : You're on.

[PERCY *returns with the visitor.* MR. WILLIE RAGG *still frequents a rather too fashionable tailor, and his hair, which is greying, has grown long enough at the sides to form a streaky trellis-work across the desert top. The moustache is slightly waxed, in the fashion of his hey-day, and to that date also belongs the exuberant courtliness of his manner as contrasted with the casual reserve of his modern prototype.*

WILLIE : Ah, my dear Jane, three months, isn't it ? What a pleasure it is to see you again. Percy, you must treat that girl very well. Do you know, you've altered so little, my dear, that it makes me feel young to see you. A tonic, that's what you are—a tonic.

MINNIE : To be taken in small doses once every three years.

WILLIE : Ah, so there's old Minnie. Men may come and men may go, but Minnie goes on for ever.

MINNIE : Aren't you a very ill-mannered young man ? I'm only eighty-six.

JANE : So she is, and a very young eighty-six too.

WILLIE : Well, she's probably younger in spirit than I am.

MINNIE : I'd give you " younger in spirit."

JANE : Minnie, stop quarrelling. Well, how have you been, Willie ? (*Mischievously*) Percy should have made you come to dinner.

PERCY (*when he has recovered*) : Indeed, I would have done, but I thought—I thought that you would be certain to be engaged.

WILLIE : And so I was, my dear fellow, so I was.

[*As he speaks, he fingers a monocle that dangles by a black moiré ribbon.* MINNIE *notices, and, without lowering her voice, comments to* JANE.

MINNIE : Dead heat.

WILLIE : I beg your pardon ?

JANE : Don't take any notice. What were you going to say ?

WILLIE : Well, I was going to tell you what I came round about.

JANE : Is it business ? If it is, perhaps you'd like me to leave you.

WILLIE : It is business, but I should hate you to leave us. I think you will be interested. The fact is, Percy, I've got on to a rather remarkable thing. When I was at Le Touquet I became friendly with a man called Kalisch. I could tell at once that he was a very clever man ; he seemed to take a great fancy to me. Now, it turns out that he's an inventor, and there's an invention of his that he's working upon now and which I'm helping him to finance. Do you follow me ?

PERCY : I think so.

WILLIE : Well, I'll tell you all about it.

[*In his eagerness,* WILLIE *puts his monocle to his eye—his right eye.*

MINNIE (*to* JANE) : You win.

WILLIE : What's that ?

JANE : Minnie, you're not to interrupt. Go on, Willie.

WILLIE : Well, the fact is, the experiments are nearly completed, but they're costly. He has a lot of money of his own in it, and I have put in all I could afford, and now we want to find

somebody else to help us over the next few months. He calculates that by January he'll have everything ready for the Patent Office.

PERCY : But what is the invention ?

WILLIE : I'll tell you. A fellow's not a fool, as you know. I have been in this world some little time now, and I have kept my eyes open, so that I am the last person on earth to be taken in by any charlatan who comes along and says he's an invention to sell. But this is one of those simple everyday things that anybody might think of and nobody has. How should I explain ? Now you, Jane, supposing you're reading the evening paper and Percy grabs at it, what happens ?

JANE : Percy never would grab at it.

WILLIE : But supposing he did.

JANE : I should pull his nose.

WILLIE : Very right and proper too. What I mean is, what would happen to the newspaper ?

JANE : I have no doubt it would continue to be published as usual.

WILLIE : No, I mean, what would happen to your copy of it—to that particular copy of it ?

JANE : It would tear.

WILLIE (*profoundly*) : Exactly. Percy, do you realise that ? It would tear.

PERCY : Of course, I realise that, but I realised that before.

WILLIE : Take another instance. What shall I say ? Suppose you one day, Percy, in a temper threw a book at Peter, what would happen ?

JANE : He would miss.

WILLIE : Never mind ; supposing he did.

PERCY : Do you want me to say it would tear ?

WILLIE : I do.

PERCY : Very well, then. It would tear.

WILLIE : Now you see what follows. It is exactly this point that my friend Kalisch seized upon. He, too, realised that paper will tear ; in fact, for years that has been almost the only fact that he has been conscious of. That fact has preyed upon and worried his brain until his wife thought that he might lose his reason. But what has been the result ? For the last eighteen months he has devoted himself to the invention of a paper that will not tear, and he is now within a few weeks of success.

[*He pauses portentously, and looks round him for acclamation.*

MINNIE (*at length*) : Damn fool.

WILLIE : Ah, Minnie, that is what has been said about all pioneers. But, mark my words, within a very few years paper will not be made of paper at all. (*With great gravity*) It will be made of rubber.

JANE : And what will rubber be made of ?

WILLIE : Leather.

PERCY : My dear Ragg, you're not serious.

WILLIE : I am ; perfectly serious. What I've said is an exaggerated way of putting it, of course, but my friend's invention that will take the place of paper is a preparation consisting partly of rubber and partly of leather ; specially treated cowhide.

JANE : And where does he find the rubber cows ?

WILLIE : You may laugh, my dear, but just wait. You'll see, you'll see.

PERCY : But the expense ?

WILLIE : Ah, you've put your finger on the heart of it. That is the problem we're working at now. Have you ever heard of by-products, waste-products ? That is the keynote of the whole scheme. We need rubber and we need cowhide. But my friend has calculated that in London alone enough rubber is wasted every month to manufacture a hundred thousand tons of paper.

JANE : And are enough cows wasted too ?

WILLIE (*amiably patronising*) : Dear Jane ! Always so womanly ! Take a simple instance. You tumble off a bus, Percy. What happens ? You lose the rubber heel off your shoe. At present who wants it ? No one. It lies in the road solitary and neglected. But that will all be changed. My friend will want it ; my friend will be after it quick and lively. My friend will have seized on it almost before it has stopped rolling, before you have regained consciousness. He'll want it for his untearable rubber-leather paper.

JANE : But doesn't it occur to you, Willie, that a world in which paper will not tear is likely to be even more inconvenient than a world in which it does ?

WILLIE : No, I can see no inconvenience in that ; nor does my friend Kalisch.

JANE : Well, tell me this ; supposing Percy were to light his pipe with a spill of your friend's paper, would the room be filled with a smell of burning rubber or of—of roast beef ?

WILLIE : My friend's paper will not burn.

PERCY : But imagine a world in which paper will not burn !

WILLIE : I have already done so, and I do so still without misgiving. Anyhow, there it is. I put the whole thing in untechnical language, but if you would like to meet my friend Kalisch he could explain it better than I. What do you say ?

PERCY : Well, I am not a speculative man, and, as I am sure you'll find plenty of people only too anxious to make an investment of that kind, I think I'll leave it alone.

WILLIE : As you will, as you will. You'll be sorry one day, but I shall have no difficulty in finding the money, and certainly wouldn't persuade you. Still, while we're talking about money, I don't mind telling you, as an old friend, that I'm in rather low water at the moment myself. Amusing, isn't it ? Of course, things will right themselves quite soon, but it did occur to me, as I walked here to-night, that you might be glad of the opportunity to give me a hand out. Nothing big, of course—just a hundred or two. Mind you, plenty of people I know would be ready and eager to advance it, but I said to myself, "No, I ought to give Percy Middling the chance first. We've been friends all these years." (PERCY *is about to speak.*) No, no, don't thank me. The obligations of friendship are something that we needn't talk about. Men like you and me understand.

PERCY : I was only going to say that if fifty pounds would be any good to you——

WILLIE : Well, fifty pounds wouldn't come amiss, but to be quite frank with you——

[*At this moment* PETER, *a fine, nice-looking boy of about twenty-three, opens the door, and closes it a trifle mysteriously behind him.*

PETER (*not too loudly*) : I say, I've—I've brought a woman into the house.

JANE : Peter !

PETER : No, listen. I think she's ill. She looks it. (*To* WILLIE, *parenthetically*) Good evening, sir.

WILLIE : Good evening, Peter.

PERCY : But who is she ?

PETER : I haven't the faintest idea.

WILLIE (*delighted*) : Well, what do you say to that !

[*He laughs boisterously.*

PERCY : Haven't the faintest idea ?

PETER : No, but I can find out.

JANE : How did you meet her ?

PETER : Outside, in the street.

JANE : Peter, is she a—is she——

PETER : I don't know what she is. I only know she's ill and—and somehow strange. I'd noticed her hanging about the house several times during the last few days, and she'd always looked at me queerly. She seemed very down and out. And to-night she seemed half frozen and exhausted, and—well, I couldn't pass her without speaking, so I just said, " Do you feel ill ? " She didn't answer at first—simply looked at me. Then she said, " What's your Christian name ? " I said " Peter." Then came the strange thing. She looked across the square as though I

weren't there, and muttered to herself, " Peter —Peter Middling ! "

JANE : My dear !

PETER : I said, " How did you know that ? " She took no notice, but asked me how long we'd been in this house. I told her, and she said, almost in a whisper, " So your grandfather is dead ? " When I said he wasn't, she just looked at me and began to move away. But I wouldn't let her. She looked so bad, and I made her come in. There, that's what happened. She's waiting in the hall.

WILLIE : Well, I'll be blowed !

JANE : Anyhow, we can't keep her hanging about in the hall.

PERCY (*to* PETER) : What do you want us to do ?

PETER : I don't know. See to her, that's all.

MINNIE : Peter. (*It is apparently a summons with a definite and traditional meaning, for* PETER *goes to her as a matter of course and lifts her from her perch on to the floor.*) I'll go and have a look at her.

PERCY (*a little puzzled*) : I don't know that you should have done this, Peter.

WILLIE : Other times, other customs. In our day you and I wouldn't have done it, Percy; but you must be broadminded. Boys will be boys.

JANE : Don't be absurd, Willie; you haven't understood at all.

WILLIE (*knowingly*) : I am older than you, my dear. Tell me, Peter, is she very beautiful ?

PETER : No, I don't think she's beautiful at all. She's rather ragged, not very clean, and, as far as I remember, rather ugly.

[*But this is only almost true, as we shall see in a minute. For* MINNIE *now comes back hand in hand with the* VISITOR. *It is true that her clothes are very, very shabby, her shoes and stockings muddy, her face dead-white and her eyes unhealthily large. It is true that wisps of hair the colour of burnt straw hang carelessly and untended from beneath her hat; but, for all that, it is clear to those of us who can see below the surface that she is not really less pretty than was* MRS. SARAH MOONLIGHT *fifty years ago. She walks slowly, but is unabashed, and smiles a dim, friendly smile.*

JANE : Come along and sit down here by the fire.

THE VISITOR : I'd like to, but don't let me be a trouble to you. (*On her way to the chair that* PETER *is setting for her she takes a second look at* JANE.) Are you my—are you Peter's mother ?

JANE : Yes, I am.

THE VISITOR (*smiling upon her approvingly*) : Well now, there now.

PERCY : You'd like something to eat, wouldn't you ?

THE VISITOR (*turning slowly towards him, speaking half to herself*) : And that is Percy Middling.

JANE : How do you know his name ?

THE VISITOR (*patting* JANE'S *hand just as though she were her daughter*) : Ah, you musn't ask me a lot of questions. (*Then, as she speaks, she sways a little, and* PETER, *going quickly to her side, leads her to the chair. After she has been sitting a moment or two she speaks again.*) I'm all right really ; don't bother about me. It's just that I haven't been very well lately. I have had a kind of pain here. (*She puts her hand on her heart.*) But I'm better now.

JANE : Do you feel well enough to come with me and have something to eat ?

THE VISITOR : Yes, quite well enough, but I am not hungry. I have eaten already. It is merely that I am cold.

PETER : Then you'd better have a drink. I'll mix you a whiskey.

[*And he goes to the decanter.*

THE VISITOR : No, I'd rather not, thank you. I hate the taste of whiskey.

PETER : Then you must take it as a medicine. I hate the taste of whiskey, too, but I still frequently take it for pleasure.

[*He hands her a glass and, grimacing, she drinks.*

THE VISITOR (*handing the glass back to* PETER) : Wasn't I good ? Now, Peter, come and sit down here. (*She indicates the arm of her chair.*) You've got to tell me all about yourself.

[*The others look at each other in perplexity at this self-assurance.*

PETER (*complying*) : Well, there isn't much to tell.

THE VISITOR : There's a great deal to tell. Are you at Oxford or Cambridge ?

PETER : No, I've just come down.

THE VISITOR : From which ?

PETER : Oxford.

THE VISITOR : Like your grandfather, eh ?

PETER (*perplexed*) : Yes ; but how did you know ?

THE VISITOR : There, darling, don't ask me questions ; let me ask you.

WILLIE (*involuntarily*) : Darling !

[*But the* VISITOR *hears him.*

THE VISITOR (*fixing her eye on him for a moment*): I know you ; at least, I think so.

WILLIE : Alas, madam, I'm afraid you do not.

THE VISITOR (*her brows knit*) : Yes, I do. Wait a moment. Isn't it Georgie—Mr. Georgie Ragg ? No, Willie Ragg.

WILLIE : Well, I'm blowed ! How did you know that ? I don't think we've ever met ?

JANE : Who are you ? Do tell us.

THE VISITOR : I ? I'm just an old lady who has rather come down in the world.

PERCY : Old, indeed !

THE VISITOR : I used to teach the piano and play a little at concerts, but concerts got rarer and rarer, and so did the pupils. You see, my methods of teaching became old-fashioned. (*As she speaks, her eye falls on a photograph of* TOM MOONLIGHT. *Her expression sobers at once, and, heedless of the others, she moves slowly towards it. For a moment or two she contemplates the picture in silence, and then, without turning, asks gravely*) Where is he ?

PETER (*the first to recall himself*) : He's upstairs.

THE VISITOR : Can I see him ?

JANE : No, I'm afraid not possibly. You see, he's a very old gentleman. He'd be asleep now. We have to take great care of him.

[*But unobtrusively* MINNIE *slips out of the room.*

THE VISITOR : I see. Was this photo just taken ?

JANE : That ? That was taken before the war.

THE VISITOR (*with difficulty*) : He—he looks older now ?

JANE : Oh, yes, a lot.

THE VISITOR : Peter's like him.

JANE : He was as a child.

THE VISITOR : Is he well ?

JANE : Well, he is very feeble. The doctor isn't very pleased with him. His memory's gone, and he really doesn't recognise people. He hasn't recognised any of us for months.

THE VISITOR : Poor Mr. Moonlight ! Darling Mr. Moonlight.

PETER : He hasn't really been the same since my grandmother died.

THE VISITOR (*mainly to herself*) : Your—your grandmother.

PETER : You know, you can see him to-morrow all right.

[*But at that moment the door opens and* MR. MOONLIGHT, *leaning heavily on* MINNIE, *himself appears. He is wearing a heavy dressing-gown, and* MINNIE *has wrapped a thick muffler about his neck. He aids himself also with a rubber-tipped stick. Everybody, except the* VISITOR, *starts at this apparition.*

JANE : Father !

[*For a moment he looks at them all without recognition, and then he notices the* VISITOR. *He evinces no surprise.*

TOM : Ah, my dear, I've been asleep.

THE VISITOR (*clearly, naturally, though her face is drained of all colour*) : Yes, Tom.

TOM : Has Edith gone ?

THE VISITOR : Edith ? Yes, dear, she's gone.

TOM : Good. I'm worried about Edith. (*He sits down.*) Worried about what you told me this morning. Here, my dear. (*The* VISITOR *goes to*

him.) I've been thinking it over, and I believe you're right. Edith *is* in love with me.

THE VISITOR : Of course she is, darling. We all are.

TOM : Including you, eh? This morning you had a very different story; then it was "except me."

THE VISITOR : Was it, Mr. Moonlight? Perhaps I've grown older since then.

TOM : Have you, indeed? Well, I'll tell you a secret. I never believed you. You love me very much indeed.

THE VISITOR : Clever Mr. Moonlight!

TOM : Am I right?

THE VISITOR : You're right, blessed.

[*And the old man chuckles with delight. Then suddenly he looks at her.*

TOM : Hey, hey, now where's that dress?

THE VISITOR : What dress?

TOM : What dress indeed! Why, your birthday dress, of course; *my* dress.

THE VISITOR : Oh, it's—it's put away.

TOM (*a little piteously*) : Don't you like it?

[*It is now that* MINNIE *starts delving mysteriously among voluminous tissue paper in the bottom drawer of the tall-boy.*

THE VISITOR : Of course I like it, but I can't wear it always.

TOM : This morning you sang to me in it.

THE VISITOR : I remember, darling.

TOM : Sarah.

THE VISITOR : Yes, dear.

TOM : Please wear the pink dress.

THE VISITOR : I can't, dearest. Let me wear it some other time.

MINNIE : She'll wear it for you now. I've had it all put away safe. Here now.

[*And there it is, a little crumpled and smelling mightily of camphor.*

THE VISITOR : Is it—is it all right, Minnie ?

MINNIE : Of course it's all right.

TOM : That's not it.

MINNIE : Indeed it is.

TOM : I tell you there were more blue bows on it.

MINNIE : And *I* tell you there never were.

[*As they argue, the* VISITOR *slips out quietly with the dress.*

TOM (*chuckling a little*) : The blue bows ! That was Madame Chose's idea. I was against it.

MINNIE : Well, there's more pink than blue, and the pink was your idea. And I must go and help.

[*She follows the* VISITOR.

PETER (*gently*) : Grandpa, who's that ?

TOM : Eh ? Who's that ? Why, that's my wife, young man. Who do you think it is ?

PETER : Why do you think it's your wife, grandpa ?

TOM : Why do I think so ? Heavens, oughtn't I to know my own wife ? Who are you ?

PETER : I'm Peter.

TOM : Well, I don't know you, sir, and I don't much want to.

PETER : I think your wife's very pretty, grandpa.

TOM (*won over at once*) : Do you, Mr. Peter ? And

she is too. That's what they all say. And, what's more, she don't alter. Do you know that? She don't alter. (*And then he mutters to himself, musing*) Don't alter! Now, what's that bit about altering? She's worried about that, ain't she? There's something about altering. I don't like that bit. I've forgotten it.

PETER: Grandpa, what is your wife called?

TOM: Eh? She's called Sarah. Sarah Jones before she met me. (*Then a little dim chuckle.*) I'll tell you something, if you want to know. She used to say that's why she married me. See? Couldn't stand Sarah Jones at any price.

JANE (*softly*): He—he thinks it's his first wife.

TOM: What do they say? Don't they like my Sarah?

PETER: Of course they do. Especially me, grandpa. I think she's lovely.

TOM: That's right, Mr. Peter. And I'll tell you another thing, if you won't let it go any farther. We've got a little daughter, and, between you and me, when she grows up she's going to be just as pretty.

PETER: I'm sure she is, grandpa.

TOM: And she's called Jane.

PETER (*gently*): Would you like to see her, grandpa?

[*So* JANE *steps forward.*

TOM (*although he sees her*): Oh, no, she's been in bed a long time. (PETER *is about to attempt an explanation, but* JANE, *with a gesture, stops him.*) Where's Sarah?

PETER : She's coming in a minute.

[*And there is the* VISITOR *again, dressed in poor* SARAH MOONLIGHT'S *pink frock, and looking just as beautiful, with* MINNIE *in attendance. With her finger to her mouth, she motions the others not to tell the old gentleman that she has come back. Then, as they watch her in silence, she moves quietly to the piano and, seating herself, plays a few slow, scarcely audible chords.* MR. MOONLIGHT *listens while in a sweet voice the* VISITOR *sings to him an old song of Mendelssohn's :*

> Oh, for the wings, for the wings of a dove,
> Far away, far away would I rove——

As she sings, MR. MOONLIGHT, *beaming, rises, crosses to her chair, and sits upon the edge of it, just as he sat beside* MRS. MOONLIGHT *fifty years ago. The song is finished, the last chords die away, and the* VISITOR, *like* MRS. MOONLIGHT *fifty years ago, strikes the first raucous notes of " Tommy, Make Room for your Uncle " ; but, unlike* MRS. MOONLIGHT, *she cannot go on. Her eyes brim up, she chokes a little, she presses her handkerchief to her nose. Her other hand old* TOM MOONLIGHT *is holding tight, tight.*

TOM (*at length ; almost in a whisper*) : I'm a very lucky man, Mrs. Moonlight. (*The* VISITOR *cannot yet trust herself to speak, but she nods her assent.*) And a very, very happy man, eh ?

THE VISITOR (*smiling*) : Yes, darling.

TOM : And you're a very happy woman, Mrs. Moonlight.

THE VISITOR : Very happy, Tom. I think I've never been so happy in my life as I am now.

TOM : But think of the luck of it ! There are millions of women in England ; why should it

just happen that of them all I should meet you? Because I'm certain of this, Mrs. Moonlight: I could never, never be happy with any woman *but* you.

THE VISITOR (*almost merrily*): That's what *you* think, Mr. Moonlight.

TOM: It's what I know. (*Then, more soberly*) Poor Edith. I'm worried about Edith. I wish we could find a husband for her. Sarah, I think I shall go to bed. I'm feeling tired—and sleepy.

THE VISITOR: Yes, darling, then you go.

[*He rises with her help.*

TOM: Are you coming up now?

THE VISITOR: No, dear, not just yet; but I won't wake you.

TOM: You may; you may. Good night.

[*He kisses her.*

THE VISITOR: Good night, darling. (*And, with* MINNIE *in attendance, he goes. For a moment or two after the door closes there is silence. Then abruptly the* VISITOR *turns to the others. Her face is radiant; not even* SARAH MOONLIGHT *could have looked lovelier, her eyes half closed as she breathes.*) Oh, I'm so happy.

[*The clock strikes the half-hour.*

PERCY (*striving for normality*): Er—that's half-past nine.

PETER (*coming to himself*): Yes, I suppose I ought to go and change. (*To the* VISITOR, *half apologetic, half fascinated* I promised to go to a party.

THE VISITOR: Have you, Peter? (*Coaxing*) Don't go to your party to-night. Sit and talk to me.

PETER : Well—I'd like to, but—— (*He breaks off.*)

THE VISITOR : But what ?

PETER : But nothing really, I suppose. I'd rather sit and talk to you.

THE VISITOR : Nice Peter.

JANE : But can you get out of it ?

PETER : Yes, it won't matter. There are plenty of them. I'll ring up in the morning.

WILLIE (*teasing him*) : Are you sure you oughtn't to go, Peter ?

THE VISITOR : Why do you want him to ?

WILLIE (*gallantly*) : Then I could stay and talk to you in his place.

THE VISITOR : As gallant as ever, Mr. Ragg. (*Mischievously*) Tell me, sir, have you been to Paris lately ?

WILLIE (*a little puzzled*) : Not for some months. Why ?

THE VISITOR : Fancy that, and a fellow loves Paris, too. But perhaps you meet her somewhere else, then ?

WILLIE : Meet who ?

THE VISITOR : Oh, fickleness ! Why, Joy, of course.

WILLIE : Upon my soul, I don't know who you're talking about.

THE VISITOR : Forgotten Joy ? And she was so sweet, too. At least, I believe you thought so. You'll tell me next that you were never engaged to Jane.

WILLIE : Certainly I was engaged to Jane.

THE VISITOR : And why did you never marry her, pray ?

WILLIE : Because she threw me over, madam.

THE VISITOR : Oh, Jane, how could you ? (*To* WILLIE) And for no reason ?

WILLIE : No doubt she had her own reasons.

THE VISITOR : Perhaps she liked Mr. Percy Middling better ?

WILLIE (*involuntarily*) : Good heavens, no ! It was simply that her parents persuaded her.

THE VISITOR : And it had nothing to do with Joy ?

WILLIE : I tell you I know nothing about Joy. To the best of my knowledge, I have never known a Joy.

THE VISITOR : In any case, a fellow can't be expected to remember everyone.

JANE (*a little awed*) : Who are you ?

THE VISITOR (*smiling at her*) : Poor puzzled Jane !

[*She takes her hand and pats it between her own, as though she were a small girl.*

JANE : How do you know all about us ? Please tell us who you are.

THE VISITOR : Just an old woman who's feeling rather more light of heart than she should at her age.

JANE : But that doesn't tell us anything.

THE VISITOR : If I told you more, my child, I should be more mysterious, not less.

[*They don't notice* MINNIE'S *return until she speaks.*

MINNIE : He's asking for you.

[*There is something foreboding in her voice, and it is with large, grave eyes that the* VISITOR *follows* MINNIE *slowly, almost, as it were, reluctantly, while the others look on in silence. That silence continues for a moment after she has gone, until at length* JANE *breaks it.*

JANE : Percy, I'm nervous.

PERCY (*reassuring himself at the same time as her*) : It's all right, my dear. There's nothing to be nervous about. What is there to be nervous of ?

JANE : I don't know. It wouldn't be so bad if I knew. It's just because I don't know.

PETER : But she won't do you any harm, mother. How can she ? Why should she ?

JANE : I want to know who she is. Why does she behave so strangely, talk so strangely ? Why does she treat me like a little child ?

WILLIE : My dear, she's probably a little bit——

[*He taps his forehead significantly.*

JANE : That doesn't explain how she knows all about us ; all our names, all our history.

PERCY : Perhaps she knows somebody who knows us all. It may all be a joke somebody's playing on us.

PETER : It doesn't seem as if she's playing a joke. She doesn't seem that kind of person.

JANE : Why does father think he knows her ? Why does she talk to him quite naturally, as though they have known each other all their lives ? He thinks it's my mother.

PERCY : Well, surely that isn't very mysterious, my dear. After all, your father hasn't known anyone for months, and it's just as reasonable that he might think he knows this girl.

JANE (*nervously, almost with awe*) : But there's something else.

[*They wait for her to go on, but she doesn't.*

PERCY : What's that ?

JANE : I won't say, I can't say.

PETER : Why, is it so terrible ?

JANE : I think it is.

PERCY : Never mind. It can't be so terrible that you can't tell me.

JANE (*coming to a decision, and suddenly facing them*) : Very well, then. I tell you I know who she is. You'll think I'm mad. It's Joy.

PERCY : Jane !

PETER : Who is Joy ?

JANE : My cousin. She lives in Italy, or used to.

WILLIE : She kept talking about a Joy.

PERCY: But this is a girl, my dear, and Joy's as old as you are.

JANE : I know. I can't explain it. I just feel it. It isn't merely the resemblance, though they're as like as two peas.

PERCY : But how can you remember what Joy was like ? You haven't seen her for over twenty-five years.

JANE : But I do remember. I've never forgotten her.

PERCY : Perhaps this is Joy's daughter. That might account for her knowing all about us.

WILLIE : Yes, there's an idea. How about that ?

JANE : But, if it is, why should she come back, and, before any of us can——

[*And then the door opens and* MINNIE *is there again. How small she suddenly seems !* JANE *breaks off, and all of them, with unaccountable foreboding in their hearts, wait for her to speak. At last she does.*

MINNIE : Well—well, he's dead.

[*For a second or two no one stirs. Then* JANE, *her voice hardly above a whisper.*

JANE : Minnie !

MINNIE : She was with him. He was in her arms.

[*At length the spell loosens ;* PERCY *goes to the telephone and* JANE *a step or two towards the door.*

I shouldn't go. Just bide a wee.

[*But it is not only* MINNIE'S *voice that arrests them. Almost before they see her they feel the* VISITOR *is coming. They wait, watching the door, and, walking slowly, slowly, she comes, looking at nobody, oblivious of everybody. Her face has no tragic mask ; indeed, there is a strange, almost unearthly content upon it. In the middle of the room she stops.* JANE *takes a few steps towards her, but the* VISITOR, *without looking, without turning her head, speaks.*

THE VISITOR : It's all right. I'm all right, quite all right. I don't want any help . . . I'm not unhappy. . . It was really very—very beautiful. It would be wicked to be unhappy . . . I'm only—only very tired. (*She sways a little, and her left hand flutters to her breast.*) I wonder why I'm so tired. (*Gently* PETER *leads her to her chair. She lies back in it and her eyes close.*) Thank you, Peter. . . . He just said to me, " I love you, Mrs. Moonlight, very, very dearly." He just said that. . . . He looked happy, too. (*The seconds go by in silence.*) Jane. Where's Jane ?

JANE (*gently*) : Here I am.

THE VISITOR : Where's your hand ? (JANE *gives it to her.*) That's right. I'm so pleased with you, Jane. . . . I've always liked your nice Percy Middling, and you've done well together, haven't you ? A nice boy and a nice home. (*She pauses again.*) " I love you, Mrs. Moonlight, very,

very dearly." (PETER *is holding her other hand, for he has not let it go.*) Peter, are you listening?

PETER (*taking her hand in both of his*) : Of course I am. What is it?

THE VISITOR : Peter, I want you always—always to be a good boy. . . . You are now, aren't you?

PETER : Why, I don't know.

THE VISITOR : But *I* know. You're a very good boy . . . any grandmother (*she repeats the word, and savours it strangely*)—grandmother—would be glad of you. . . . But you've got to be a good boy always. Like Tom. . . . Do you see? Just keep yourself—gentle. . . . Like Tom. . . . Just gentle. (*She sighs.*) Oh, I'm so tired. . . . "I love you, Mrs. Moonlight, very, very dearly." . . . Jane, do I look happy?

JANE : Very happy, dear. Are you?

THE VISITOR : Oh, so happy. (*There is again a long pause. Again her hand moves involuntarily to her left breast. When she speaks again she is hardly audible.*) It's funny to be so tired. Perhaps —perhaps. . . . Oh, how lovely. . . . Now, Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant . . . depart in peace . . . for mine eyes have seen . . . mine eyes have seen. . . .

[*Her lips move again, but no sound is heard. There is a little happy smile round her mouth, and then her head falls heavily on her shoulder and the hand that was to her heart drops over the arm of the chair. Everyone except* MINNIE *makes a little involuntary movement of concern, but no one dares to break the silence.*

Clachaig